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# JOHN WESLEY

## THE HERO OF THE SECOND REFORMATION

EDWARD MILLER



Methodist  
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# JOHN WESLEY

*THE HERO OF THE SECOND  
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BY

EDWARD MILLER, M.A.

AUTHOR OF

"JOHN KNOX, THE HERO OF THE SCOTTISH REFORMATION"

THE NATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL UNION

57 & 59 LUDGATE HILL, LONDON, E.C. 4

*Printed in Great Britain*



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# JOHN WESLEY

## CHAPTER I

### SAVED TO SERVE

**E**PPWORTH is a little town of straggling streets in the north-west corner of Lincolnshire. Two hundred years ago, in the rectory with its low, thatched roof, a clergyman was living with his wife and eight young children.

On a February night of 1709, with frost deep in the ground, and a driving north wind rattling at the rectory doors, the hush of midnight was suddenly broken by that most appalling of all cries, the alarm of Fire. We can guess with what fear tugging at their hearts the parents ran from room to room, calling their children, and with what joy they found themselves on the grass outside,

saved from the cruel splendour of the flames. But their joy suddenly froze to horror when it was discovered that one of the children was missing. The frantic father rushed back into the house, only to find the wooden staircase ablaze and crashing to its fall. And now the little one appeared at the window casement, terror blanching his face. Neighbours rushed for a ladder, but none could be found. Then the rector, with a despairing cry, sank on his knees and committed his darling to his Heavenly Father's care.

At this moment two stalwart peasants ran to the wall beneath the window. One of them, climbing on the shoulders of the other, just succeeded in reaching the child, and snatched him out on the instant that the burning roof fell in.

"Come, neighbours!" said the clergyman; "let us kneel and give thanks to God. He has given me my eight children. Let the house go. I am rich enough." Indeed, he was ruined. His books (he had the ample library of a scholar and a man of letters), his

manuscripts which were to bring money to eke out a scanty income—all had disappeared in ashes and smoke. For years the family had felt the pinch of poverty. For years to come they would feel it all the keener for the loss. Once, at least, the rector was to be clapped in a debtor's jail. And on the day of his death, his little farm stock was seized by an unscrupulous creditor for a debt of a few pounds.

But there was no room that night for any regret at the bleak prospect before them. The child they had counted dead was given back to them, unscathed. For the six-year-old child thus rescued, the impressions of that night never faded. His mother kept its memory close in her heart, and looked on him as one destined for a great career. The mother's belief became the boy's belief. That night's peril and escape were prophetic. Under his portrait, many years after, was painted the picture of a burning house, with the inscription, "*Is not this a brand plucked from the burning?*" and the name, John Wesley.

Someone has said that every arrival of a soul in the world is a mystery and a shut casket of possibilities. But to whom, of all that crowd round the burning rectory, did even the whisper of a hint come that the infant snatched from that nursery window would live to change the heart of England ? and that, for centuries to come, his influence, like the encompassing sea, would spread round the world and break upon every shore ? Yet even so it came to pass.

## CHAPTER II

### WHITE UNTO HARVEST

**N**O Englishman can read the history of Europe in the eighteenth century without a glow of pride. It was in this century that England first really came to the front among the nations, and took her place as arbitress of the destinies of Europe, and, indeed, of the world.

The little island in the northern seas grew to be an Empire, the largest the world has ever seen. India and Canada, Cape Colony and Australia—these vast tracts of territory were acquired in this century and the first decade of the nineteenth.

What a shining roll of great names this period of time can show ! It was the century of Marlborough and Wolfe and Wellington ; of Rodney and Nelson ; of other heroes,

only less renowned than these, on ships of war or battlefield.

In Politics arose such leaders as Walpole, the two Pitts, Burke, and Fox. In Philosophy, such epoch-makers as Berkeley, Adam Smith, and Hume. This century saw the wet canvases of Gainsborough, Reynolds, Hogarth, and Romney.

Last and best of all, look at the names that Literature has to show. To the first half of the eighteenth century belong Swift and Addison and Pope, with the novelists Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, and Smollett. To the second half, belong Dr. Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, William Cowper, Robert Burns, and Edward Gibbon.

That was indeed a brilliant period in the intellectual life of our country. But when we turn to consider its moral aspect, the picture changes, the colours fade. The nation is the individual writ large, and that had happened to England which sometimes happens to a man—development had been in one direction only. The intellect had grown clear and strong; the heart had

grown cold. According to an historian of the time, England had fallen into utter paganism. Religion had sunk into something like contempt. It was considered "bad form" to show reverence in Church, or to speak of Christianity as anything more than a convenient superstition. The great Wilberforce once had this taunt flung at him by a debater in Parliament: "The honourable *and religious* gentleman." Said a witty French cynic visiting England: "Here money is greatly prized, honour and virtue but little."

As for the Church, it was dead; all its power gone from it. The clergy were illiterate. Green, the historian, tells us that in the eighteenth century they were the idlest and most lifeless in the world. Of course, there were shining exceptions. John Wesley's father was a devoted pastor and a saintly man of God. Indeed, the rectory fire which came so near to a calamity was the third attempt at a fiendish revenge on the part of parishioners smarting under their rector's rebukes. But many of the clergy were



“idle shepherds,” with as little faith in vital Christianity as had the popes of Luther’s time :

“And if a priest be foul in whom we trust,  
Small wonder if a lewèd man do rust.”

When the Church fails in her mission, the whole of Society becomes corrupt. It happened so in England. “A heartless cynicism,” says Lecky, “like a creeping blight, settled upon the upper classes.” Parliamentary life was rotten through and through. Walpole, the great leader, laughed aloud at appeals to the loftier motives of action. “For young members who talked of public virtue or patriotism he had one good-natured answer, which contained the essence of his cynical philosophy : ‘You will soon grow wiser.’ ”

There was a great and growing neglect of Sunday among the ruling caste. Cabinet dinners, and even Cabinet councils, were constantly held on that day. Sunday concerts and card-parties were common. Drunkenness was almost universal, and the drunkard walked unashamed. One of the his-

torians puts it on record that Oxford, when Prime Minister, more than once went drunk into the presence of his queen. Addison, the polished essayist, was often intoxicated in public. Bolingbroke used to drive from a night's debauch straight to his office in the morning, where he sat at the nation's business with a wet cloth round his head.

These great wits and leaders, in their hours of relaxation, indulged publicly in conversation the most disgusting. Dr. Johnson tells us that Walpole used to talk grossly at table, because it was the only kind of talk in which everyone could join. If men's talk was unclean, hardly less so were the novels of that period. They were, in many pages, foul past description, and few books, written then, are fit to be read to-day from cover to cover.

The stage was still worse. Plays were acted of such a character that no ladies would think of going to the theatre—without a mask. In that disguise, Modesty was supposed to be shielded ! “ It was an age,” says Mark Pattison, alluding to the first half of the century, “ destitute of faith and earnest-

ness—an age whose poetry was without romance, whose philosophy was without insight, and whose public men were without character.” The very Bishops bought their bishoprics from the King’s mistresses.

All this depravity had its pernicious effects upon the unthinking crowd. In the higher ranks, the young “Bloods” often banded themselves together and paraded the streets in search of victims for what they were pleased to call their wit. Their behaviour towards peaceable citizens and respectable women whom they caught was beyond expression disgraceful. The watchmen, often crazy with age, were powerless against them. No band of East-end hooligans to-day can be compared, for sheer brutality, to those gangs of Society men. Many a man, and many a woman, died in their hands in consequence of their ferocious treatment.

If this be true of the better classes, can it be wondered that the great mass of the people was a welter of bestiality? After the introduction of cheap gin, drunkenness increased with frightful rapidity. In some parishes

every fourth house was a tavern, and (it is told by the serious historians of the time) on the signboards of some of the inns could be read this notice : " Here you may get drunk for a penny, dead-drunk for twopence. Straw free." Prudent hosts had their cellars littered with straw, and into these the unconscious guests were dragged by servants, like the slain from a Roman arena.

Vice of every kind abounded. Highway robbery was an everyday occurrence. London was nicknamed the " Gallows-City," because of the gibbets always to be seen, their dead dangling from them until they rotted and dropped off. Criminals were hanged sometimes at the rate of a score a day in London alone. In remote districts, mobs of peasants would straggle through the villages and farms, pillaging and plundering as they went.

One feeble ray of light falls on the dark page. Here and there, little companies of people, recalling purer times and seeking a return to them, formed themselves into " Societies for the Reformation of Manners."

These Societies acted as a kind of moral Police, and by a close system of espionage sought to coerce their neighbours into good behaviour. Drinking, cursing, and Sabbath-breaking were for a time checked. But the Societies seem to have undergone a general and gradual degeneracy. The members grew so pharisaic and insincere that they came to be classed as canting hypocrites. At last they quite lost caste, and by the middle of the eighteenth century they had ceased to exist.

It is often when Religion has sunk to its lowest, that God raises up His instrument of reform. It was so in the German Reformation under Luther. So, too, was it in Scotland under Knox. When the need comes, the man comes. "The hour is timed to the man, and the man is prepared for the hour." In pity for her sore need, God gave England in the eighteenth century, a Reformer. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John Wesley.

## CHAPTER III

### THE WESLEY FAMILY

THE family of the Wesleys came of an old and honourable stock. John Wesley's grandfather and great-grandfather were clergymen, and both had suffered persecution for their faith. Bartholomew Wesley, his great-grandfather, was ousted from his living by the Act of Uniformity. His grandfather was imprisoned in the reign of Charles the Second, along with many other clergymen who refused to worship the Image that gay monarch had set up. His father, Samuel Wesley, had been sent to a dissenting college by his nonconforming parents.

But in that wintry period of religious decline even the dissenters had "passively taken the print of the age," and to bigoted

hatred of a persecuting Church added a sincere love of the world. In an impulse of revolt against the sordid ideals of his fellow-students, Samuel Wesley left the college. With the closing of the college gates behind him there was also closed the door of the friend who had paid his college fees. The independent youth, however, trudged on foot to Oxford, arriving with two pounds six shillings in his pocket to pay for board and classes! He was received as a "poor scholar," and when his course was finished he was ordained a clergyman of the Church of England, and presented to the parish of Epworth.

The stipend was poor, and Samuel Wesley's family of children increased in a ridiculous disproportion to the stipend. Nineteen children saw the light in Epworth Rectory, but twelve of them died early. Lecky is surely wrong when he tells us "their home was not a happy one: discordant dispositions and many troubles darkened it." For true happiness is surely not made unobtainable by poverty, or bereavement, or even



by "discordant dispositions"—by which we presume Lecky indicates the strong personality of the father, and of that refreshingly original character, the mother.

Susannah Wesley, a woman "of rare mental endowments," came of a high-born Puritan stock, and was the daughter of the ejected Dr. Annesley. At a time when the education of women was sadly neglected, she knew Latin and Greek, and was well read in Philosophy. In an age of scepticism, when the Unitarian taint was in the very air, she had at one time reasoned herself into Socinianism, and was only reclaimed to orthodoxy by the arguments of her husband.

Samuel Wesley could not guide her political as well as her theological opinions! The story goes that, in their early married life, before these two strong-minded characters had learned the art of accommodation and compromise, she was in secret a Jacobite, and at prayers, when her husband came to the petition for King William, she shut her lips tight on her unspoken "Amen"! The discovery of her disaffection came with such

a shock to Mr. Wesley, that it drove them apart, and apart they remained till William of Orange died, twelve months after, whereupon Wesley mounted his horse and posted home to Epworth, where his wife dutifully awaited him !

Another story told of Mrs. Wesley reveals her extraordinary strength of character. At a time when it was considered immodest for a woman to speak in public, she began (Mr. Wesley being in London at Convocation) to hold services, at first with her children alone, but by and by in the rectory kitchen with the servants and neighbours. Her sermons, or lectures, must have had some quality of interest in them, for presently the kitchen was crowded at the services. The curate, deserted, fumed at the innovation, and wrote to the rector complaining of conventicles being held in the rectory. Mr. Wesley, alarmed, wrote his wife in strong disapproval. And here is the closing sentence of her reply :

“ If you do, after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me that you *desire* me to do it, for that will not satisfy my con-

science ; but send me your *positive command*, in such full and express terms as may absolve me from guilt and punishment for neglecting the opportunity of doing good, when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Needless to say, an appeal like this was not in vain—Mr. Wesley withdrew all opposition, and the meetings went on.

Mrs. Wesley educated all her children, without help, and here was her strange and unique method. On the day each child reached his fifth birthday he was taken to the schoolroom and put to his letters. The first lesson might take an hour, it might take a day ; but before the child left the school-room he had learned the alphabet ! Next day the Bible was opened at the first chapter of Genesis. Letter by letter and word by word, the first verse was spelled out. Next day there might be more verses, until the art of reading had been thoroughly mastered. The teacher was austere, her will unbending. Often the rod of discipline was used ; and it was part of the child's education to learn to

“cry softly”—an accomplishment, indeed, which most of them acquired ere they had passed the second year.

“Chary of praise, and prodigal of counsel,” was this Spartan mother. But with all her strictness, she had a great wealth of love for her children, and a tender concern for their spiritual welfare especially. It was a matter of conscience with her to set apart one night in the week for religious talk with each child alone. Even when household cares were heavy, she hardly ever failed to keep this tryst.

It was, indeed, a home of stern piety, and the atmosphere was pure and bracing. Often, in the toilsome after years, John Wesley looked back with a sigh of content to that simple home of holy memories, where he had learned to “cry softly” on his nursery pillow. It was a splendid apprenticeship for a life of blows and buffetings.

## CHAPTER IV

### AT SCHOOL

WHEN John Wesley had passed his tenth year, the time came for him to leave home and go to school. To Charterhouse, in London, an old historic school—now moved to more beautiful surroundings at Godalming, in Surrey—he went, early in 1714.

“Carthusians,” or Charterhouse pupils, were almost without exception the sons of wealthy parents. It was by the special favour of the Duke of Buckingham that the poor country clergyman’s son was admitted. It might almost have been better if this shy, sensitive child had been spared the torture which, for four years at least, life among those rich savages meant for him. The healthy schoolboy is often a somewhat

ferocious bully, and when to a boy's natural instinct is added the temptation to a snobbish regard for wealth, we have one of the most painful beings it is possible to encounter. To this kind of life Wesley went straight from the country rectory.

We know how meagre used to be the allowance of food served out at the average public school. The boys of Charterhouse were no better and no worse than other boys—"their God was their belly." When their own plate was empty, they turned with interest to the plate next theirs. If the owner was a small or peaceable urchin, the food was speedily transferred to the plate of the stronger boy, whose necessities seemed greater. For four years John Wesley lived the life of a half-starved schoolboy, bearing it all with cheerful philosophy and uncomplaining meekness. At home he had long been accustomed to scanty food, and when there was nothing for him but dry bread, he ate it, asking no question. The treatment he met with would surely have either broken or brutalised the spirit of an ordinary boy, but it seems in

Wesley's case not even to have soured him. He had learned at home to "cry softly," and if at times there were tears in his heart, none showed on his face. He worked hard at his books, and took a high place in his class. His health improved—a fact which he attributes partly to his diet of plain bread, partly to his faithful adherence to a prescription of his father's: "Run thrice round the big garden every morning."

It never seems to have occurred to him that a daily injustice was being done. In the sunny heart of this altogether lovable lad there was no harbourage for resentment. The child is father of the man. In after years, and in harsher persecutions, we find the same beautiful spirit of non-resistance to evil which somehow never fails to surprise us, although the Founder of the Christian Faith laid it down two thousand years ago as a law of Christian conduct.

It is pleasant to learn that the boys who began by persecuting Wesley, soon came to love (with something of awe in their love) the lad whose face they never saw darken



with a frown, and from whose lips they heard only words of kindness.

For the Charterhouse School, Wesley cherished throughout his life a deep affection. He used to visit it once a year, and walk alone through its cloisters, "chewing the cud" of happy memories.

One glimpse we get into his inner life during the Charterhouse years. At a time of life when boys are giving their thoughts to food and games, Jack Wesley was deep in the problems of the spiritual life, and beginning to "methodise" all his time and toil for one great end. The trend of his life toward holiness had already been set. "The next six or seven years were spent at school, where, outward restraints being removed, I was much more negligent than before, even of outward duties, and almost continually guilty of outward sins, though they were not scandalous in the eyes of the world. However"—and here is the glimpse we get into the spiritual aspirations of this boy in his early teens—"I still read the Scriptures, and said my prayers, morning and evening. And

what I now hoped to be saved by, was—  
1, Not being so bad as other people ; 2, Having still a kindness for religion ; and 3, Reading the Bible, going to church, and saying my prayers.”

The boy who can feel like that about his religious ambitions—who regulates his devotional exercises for himself in a dormitory of persecuting schoolfellows, is far on the road to the higher life. Such a lad is likely to keep his record clean, and in maturer years, when the dust of battle is on his armour, he will look back without shame or regret upon an unsullied youth.

## CHAPTER V

### AT OXFORD

FROM Charterhouse, at the age of seventeen, Wesley went to Oxford. Here, in Christ Church, one of its largest colleges, he was enrolled a student ; and for five years, in the spacious Quad or huge Dining Hall, the little alert figure, with thin, keen face and frank, searching eyes, was constantly to be seen, flitting from group to group of undergraduates—probably the most popular man in this or any of the colleges.

Of all the great men who have Christ Church for “ Alma Mater ” (Salisbury, Gladstone, Dr. Pusey, and Rosebery among the most notable), no alumnus has ever entered her gates, or listened to “ Big Tom ” tolling his curfew of a hundred strokes, and one who

carried under his student gown mightier and more far-reaching possibilities for the future of his country and of the world, than John Wesley.

The years a man spends at college are often the best and richest—the richest in friendships and intellectual stimulus. It is a time of first impressions and discoveries. Never again is there the same glow and thrill of things as then, when the currents of life run in generous tides.

John Wesley had the happiness in fuller measure than most. For fifteen years, if we cut out the two years' curacy at Epworth, Wesley lived in Oxford—five at Christ Church, and, afterwards, ten in Lincoln.

The handsome, witty undergraduate moved in a circle of admiring friends. His was an intellect like a sword, trenchant and clear ; in debate his logical acuteness won for him many a dialectical victory amid the plaudits of his fellow-undergraduates. He composed poems far above the usual pedestrian efforts of students. And what a mesmerising talker he was ! His sunny humour had endeared

him to the home-circle at Epworth—"who can be sad where you are?" his sister wrote in a pathetic appeal for him to come to her in her trouble; and "who could be dull where Jack Wesley is?" became the proverb of the great Quad in Christ Church. It seemed, indeed, for a time that this student, with the beautiful face and piercing eyes, eager to talk, eager to engage his fellow-students, was already shaping for the life of a clergyman and man of the world, who would by and by be appointed to a comfortable living, and settle down, like the orthodox gentlemen of the Church, to a life of cultured leisure. But Providence intended a different destiny for Wesley.

About 1725 the young student began to look forward to Holy Orders. The thought brought to this eccentric man a sudden seriousness. It changed the careless lad into a somewhat sombre recluse. From the free talk of irresponsible boys he turned to the reading of books like Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, and Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying*.

These devout writings taught Wesley an entirely novel doctrine—the doctrine of Complete Consecration. With Thomas à Kempis, indeed, he at once joined issue on that perennial theme of disputation—the doctrine of Predestination. It is one of the ironies of history that Churches have been rent into loud and angry factions—“hating each other for the love of God”—over this apparent incongruity of God’s Election and Man’s Free-Will. We see but the two pillars standing opposite—Election and Free-Will. They are really the two sides of the same arch. The keystone is in Heaven.

Wesley, shocked by Kempis’s doctrine of despair, poured out his feelings in a letter to his mother. And his mother, with a woman’s daring rapidity in coming to a summary judgment, characterised the devout Kempis as “an honest weak man, that had more zeal than knowledge.”

The candidate for ordination began to regulate his life on the most rigid pattern of a mediæval ascetic. After ‘the most straitest sect’ of his religion he lived a Pharisee.

Without taking the Pharisee's pains to appear religious, he used all his arts to be religious. He divided his week with the most careful economy. Every hour of every day was marked for its particular subject of study—Greek and Arabic, Logic and Ethics, Metaphysics and Theology. His hours for eating and sleeping were tabulated with the precision of a convent or a prison. Every minute was hoarded. "I have lost ten minutes for ever," he once said, later on in life; but no man surely has had fewer occasions to regret unused moments. His fasts became so severe and so frequent that his health all but broke down. He would not have his hair dressed in the fashion of the time, but let it flow in natural ringlets to his shoulders, that he might save a little more to give to the poor. Out of every sum of money that came to him, a portion was set aside for charity.

With all this, there was never a thought that he was succeeding in an attempt to work out a righteousness and a fitness for the sacred calling. On the contrary, the nearer



he came to ordination, the more he shrank from it, in a deep dread lest wrong motives might be leading him.

In his doubt he consulted his parents, and from father and mother came conflicting counsels, in letters that give another glimpse into a depth and strength of character in both. His father advised delay and longer application to study. The wavering handwriting of this letter sent the reader's thoughts flying to the Lincolnshire parsonage—he saw the pen in his father's hand tremble as it travelled slowly across the page. Stricken in years, and bending under many burdens, the saintly old man was drawing near his end. “You see, Time has shaken me by the hand, and Death is but a little way behind him. My eyes and heart are now almost all I have left, and I bless God for them.”

The mother, for her part, was eager for her son's start at the serious business of life, provided he was ready for it. Here is a fragment of the letter from this altogether remarkable woman :

“Resolve now in good earnest to make

religion the business of your life : for, after all, that is the one thing that, strictly speaking, is necessary ; all things beside are comparatively little to the purposes of life. I heartily wish you would now enter upon a strict examination of yourself, that you may know whether you have a reasonable hope of salvation by Jesus Christ. If you have, the satisfaction of knowing it will abundantly reward your pains ; if you have not, you will find a more reasonable occasion for tears than can be met with in a tragedy.”

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DISCIPLE OF WILLIAM LAW

THOSE were busy years, between 1725 and 1729. Wesley was ordained a deacon in 1725, and elected to a Fellowship in Lincoln College in 1726. In 1727 he graduated Master of Arts, and in 1728 was ordained priest.

It was a bright day in Epworth Rectory when the news came of the Fellowship. The old man, after years of struggle with debt and numberless difficulties, was at last almost happy, and broke forth into a pathetic *Nunc dimittis*: "What will be my fate before the summer is over, God knows; but, wherever I am, my Jack is Fellow of Lincoln!" When, eight months after, his Jack, aged twenty-three, was made Greek lecturer and Moderator of the classes, the old man's cup

of joy was full ; and he who had drunk so deep of life's sorrows, tasted at last something of its sweets.

Meanwhile Wesley himself was now coming under a stronger influence than any he had yet known. There was living at this time near London that strange genius William Law. He had held a Cambridge fellowship, but being a Jacobite and Non-juror he lost it, becoming tutor to the father of Gibbon, the historian. He was now living in retirement, spending his time in meditation and the writing of books. About 1727 he published his *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*—a book which gripped and held the mind of Wesley, and made him for years the slave of its author.

There can be no doubt about the extraordinary mental endowments of William Law. The historian Hume declares that if his mind had not been "clouded by enthusiasm," he might have been "ranked with the most ingenious writers of his time"—and this is praise indeed, from Hume. Lecky says that Dr. Johnson "attributes to this book

his first strong religious impression." And Dr. Johnson himself says of the book that it is "the finest piece of hortatory theology in any language." If Dr. Johnson was made captive, it is little wonder that Wesley, with his "genius for godliness," fell so readily under the charm of Law's devout and vigorous intellect. The title of the book explains its scope: its theme is that "all worldly attainments, whether of greatness, wisdom, or bravery, are but empty sounds."

The reading of the *Serious Call* made an epoch in Wesley's life. It led him to seek out Law. To talk with him, he would walk twenty-five miles to his home in Putney; and many an hour they spent in close communion. Law struck Wesley at first as setting the target too high, and asking more than mortal man could reach. "Aim at the highest," was Law's answer to his complaint—"Aim at the highest. We shall do well to aim at the highest degree of perfection, if we may thereby at least attain to mediocrity."

Law was an extreme High Churchman,

and latterly he was swept into the strange and fathomless seas of mysticism. The disciple seemed for a time as if he might drift after his master, but the strong practical bent of his nature saved him. For years, however, Law made his influence felt, partly to Wesley's hurt, partly to his profit. To his hurt, for he passed through a phase of narrow and intense High-Churchism which came near to wrecking his whole career. To his profit, for it suddenly lifted his horizon, and disclosed to him heights of holiness unguessed before, heights which eventually he found to be beyond his reach, even beyond his hopes, until he took "the one sole path."

To reach that, he had to pass through thorny thickets and be plunged into a Slough of Despond.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE " HOLY CLUB "

C HARLES WESLEY was five years younger than John. Less robust than his brother, and of a quieter and gentler spirit, he lacked his vivacious charm. But there was a rich vein of poetry in his nature, and he was destined, in days to come, to do as much by his sacred songs for the Revival of Religion, as his brother John did by his sermons.

To say—for it has been said—that Charles Wesley was “ one of the greatest poets that ever sang ” ; that he was “ made up of music ” ; that his “ heart-strings were harp-strings,” is surely the language of loving exaggeration. Of the seven thousand hymns which he is said to have composed, only a small proportion have the ring of true poetry.



But of at least twenty it may be said that they should be bound in gold. If all the rest perish, these are priceless, and cannot perish while Christianity lives, for they are treasured in many memories. "Jesu, Lover of my Soul"; "Hark! the Herald Angels sing"; "Soldiers of Christ, Arise!"—the very titles stir the heart. Of the first of these three Henry Ward Beecher has said: "I would rather have written that hymn than have the fame of all the kings that ever sat on earth."

And Southey, himself a poet-laureate, says: "No hymns have been so much treasured in the memory or so frequently quoted on a death-bed."

There is a romance connected with "the sweet singer of Methodism." The old family name of the Wesleys was spelled indifferently, de Wellesley or Weisley. In Ireland was a family of the same name, related, some say, to the English Wesleys. Garret Weisley, a gentleman of fortune, wrote to the rector of Epworth, offering to adopt Charles. After deliberation, Charles declined, and Garret then adopted one of the family of Colleys.

This adopted son became the father of a soldier whose name appears in the Army List of 1800 as Colonel Arthur Wesley. When Charles Wesley declined Garret Weisley's offer, he rendered a twofold service to England and the world—he gave us our Revival Hymns, and Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington. If Charles had gone to Ireland and taken his place as the landowner's son, he would in all probability never have composed those exquisite hymns ; and the Conqueror of Napoleon might never have been discovered and Waterloo never fought !

When John Wesley, after a brief absence from Oxford, arrived to take up his residence as Fellow in Lincoln College, he found a little coterie of men that had been gathered together by his brother Charles for study and mutual help. They met on Sunday evenings to read Divinity, and on other evenings for secular reading. Very soon, however, they found one night a week too short for the vast subject of Theology, which gradually encroached on the week-nights, until at last the sole topic of talk was the religious life.

Nor was it confined to talk : soon they were *practising* the most austere piety. They took communion once a week. They made a rule that no books should be read save those that would help their religious life. They fasted twice a week, until they were on the verge of permanent ill-health—one indeed died. They visited the prisons, and distributed to the poor.

In that atheistic century, and in a community of free-thinking, free-living students, it is not matter for surprise that the conduct of these fifteen men was reckoned eccentric. When word went round that the “Holy Club” (as it came to be nicknamed) were on their way to Sacrament, crowds followed with raillery and ridicule. “Sacramentarians,” “Bible-bigots,” “Bible-moths,” were the terms of derision flung at them as they passed.

One of the nicknames stood out from the rest, by its peculiar appropriateness, and was by and by universally chosen as the best name for the club. A certain ancient school of physicians, in virtue of the strict code of

rules in their practice, went by the name of " Methodists." Early in the seventeenth century the name was recovered and applied to a religious sect " who esteemed all flowers of rhetoric in sermons no better than stinking weeds." They were " plain packstaff methodists," who looked on religion as the chief business of life, and followed it by strict rule and method. And now, the brilliant idea occurred to a student that this discarded nickname was highly applicable to the religious " cranks " at Oxford. The name was hailed with acclamation, and forthwith the " Holy Club " had its title changed to " Methodists."

When John Wesley came as Fellow to his rooms in Lincoln, he found to his joyful surprise that his brother Charles, with whom he had been wont of late to expostulate on his gaiety and worldliness, was the life and spirit of this despised club. To the college don, Charles handed over the leadership, and in the dingy study that looks out on Lincoln Quad, the meetings continued to be held. Thus, in that " little college of true students

in theology," as the Bishop who founded Lincoln four centuries earlier had hoped it would be (but in how different a sense!), these fifteen "true students in theology" met. And on their roll of membership appear these names: John Wesley, Charles Wesley, and George Whitefield.

## CHAPTER VIII

GEORGE WHITEFIELD

HENRY BUCKLE, the author of that informing book, "*The History of Civilization in England*," could hardly be said to write with sympathy concerning any religious movement. Yet he had the candour to bracket John Wesley and George Whitefield, and declare of them that they were two of the most remarkable men of the eighteenth century. Wesley he called the first of theological statesmen; Whitefield, the first of theological orators. Indeed, he grows warm over Whitefield, and pronounces him "the greatest orator since the apostles."

John Richard Green, after somewhat qualified praise of Whitefield, admits "the reality of his preaching, its earnestness of

belief, and its deep tremulous sympathy with the sin and sorrow of mankind."

The man who came to earn this praise was a fellow-student with Charles Wesley at Oxford, and had come under his gentle influence. Whitefield had come up from Gloucester, after a boyhood of hardship and toil in his stepfather's inn. His was a wild, stormy, and sometimes a gloomy temper. His splendid gifts of elocution and mimicry seemed to point him to the stage; but in a moment of impulse he left the home which was no home, and footed it to Oxford, where he entered Pembroke College as a "servitor"—a student, that is to say, who paid his college fees by the money got by waiting on his fellow-students.

With all his wildness, Whitefield seems to have hungered in secret for something better and higher than he had known, something which he felt life could yet give him; and when Charles Wesley passed on his way to the Holy Club meetings, his longing to follow was only kept in check by the degrading sense of social inferiority. But Charles Wesley



came to hear of him, and had him to breakfast. Detecting the kind of man he was, he forthwith haled him into the band of "true students of theology."

News went north to Epworth that the "Methodists" had become notorious in Oxford, and that John Wesley had been dubbed the "Father" of the Holy Club. "If that be so," wrote the rector, "then I must be the grandfather of it; and I need not say that I had rather any of my sons should be so dignified and distinguished than have the title of 'His Holiness.'"

It had been the desire of the old man's heart that his son should succeed him as rector. John's thoughts did not lead to Epworth, but to please his father he absented himself from Lincoln for two empty years, and buried himself in the remote parish where he first drew breath. Here, in 1735, Samuel Wesley, full of years and heavy with sorrows, fell asleep. John, undesiring but obedient, became a candidate for the vacant parish; but Walpole presented it to another—some say

because he bore a grudge against the Wesleys.

Far from resenting the Prime Minister's slight, the young man returned to Lincoln with ill-concealed joy that he was not doomed to fret his active life in a remote and inaccessible village.

This episode was hardly closed when an offer came to both brothers to go out to the new Colony of Georgia as missionaries to the Red Indians. The prospect at first was far from inviting to John. There was one great obstacle—he could not be sure that it was right to leave his widowed mother. Would she even consent to the separation? He wrote asking her mind on it, and here is her reply: “Had I twenty sons, I should rejoice that they were all so employed, *though I should never see them more.*” Here, again, in this letter of relinquishment, speaks the heart of the Spartan mother: “Son, go into battle; come back with your shield, or upon it.”

Thus, in the year of his father's death, and in the month of his mother's consent, John,

with his brother Charles, sailed with the Governor of Georgia for Savannah. John was to go among the Red Indians, Charles was to act as private secretary to Governor James Oglethorpe.

## CHAPTER IX

### IN GEORGIA

**I**N the eighteenth century a voyage to America was an adventure. What now takes a few days often took as many months. The ship in which John Wesley sailed spent four months in tacking up and down the Atlantic before they cast anchor in the Savannah River. It was in October 1735 that they set out from Gravesend ; on 5th February 1736 the godly Governor Oglethorpe led his ship's company on shore, and knelt down to thank God for deliverance from a thousand dangers of the deep.

But these four months were eventful to the Wesleys in a measure and after a manner they did not dream of when their ship fared forth. In a stern opposition to the relaxing idleness which life on an emigrant ship fosters, the

two brothers set the example of a rigorous self-discipline. They began to practise greater austerity than ever before. For food, they confined themselves to rice and biscuits. For bed, they were content to lie on the cabin floor. Rising at four, those misers of time divided the day with scrupulous exactitude into its hours for study, for public worship, for private religious talk. The ship was like a floating church. They called the crew and passengers together, preached to them and read prayers to them at frequent intervals. The very children were faithfully dealt with about their spiritual state.

Whether these devout practices impressed the worldly race of emigrants eager to push their fortunes in the new colony, we are not told. But in that rich mine from which biographers of Wesley have gathered golden stores, the *Journal* he began to write on the day he sailed, and kept for fifty-five years, until the pen dropped from his dying hand, we find this pregnant sentence: "Our end [in going to America] was not to gain the dung and dross of riches, but to save our souls

and live solely to the glory of God." That was the lofty aim of these two Oxford graduates, and we are to conceive of them on their first day at sea, setting to work by framing these rigorous rules.

On board that very ship, however, they met with men who were their masters in the art of holiness.

During the fury of a storm, when a panic fear had seized the passengers, and Wesley himself tasted the terror of death, he turned to a little group of Germans, and in a lull of the tempest heard them singing hymns of praise. The lull was followed by another outburst; a deluge of seas invaded the decks, the mainsail was torn into streaming ribbons.

"Had you no fear?" was the question Wesley put to the singers when the hurricane fell. "I thank God, no!" "But were not your women and children afraid?" "No! Our women and children are not afraid to die." Here was a height to which Wesley had not climbed. These men were Moravians—a persecuted, broken people, constantly

fleeing before their tormentors ; yet scattering the seed as they fled, until they have come to a place of honour as the greatest missionary Church in the world.

Something in the unwavering faith of these men, something brave and patient and simple beyond what Wesley had ever seen, touched his imagination and emptied his heart of its pride. These primitive people of God, on their part, were not impressed by Wesley's laborious piety. Religion to them was an attitude, not a routine of prescribed tasks. "Do you know Jesus Christ?" was the question one of them put to the Oxford don, gazing into his eyes with disconcerting frankness. It shook to the centre Wesley's faith in his elaborate scheme of salvation. But the answer was not found for two years.

In Georgia the work of the Wesleys was at first crowned with success. To go among the Indians, indeed, was deemed by the governor unsafe, in a neighbourhood infested by unfriendly natives and the hostile French. But among the white heathen abundant labour lay at their hand. The philanthropic



Oglethorpe had raked together the flotsam and jetsam from debtors' jails in England, that they might start life afresh in a new land. When John Wesley preached, crowds flocked to hear. Even to morning service at five, many parishioners came. And, when a ball was arranged by the *élite* among the settlers, the austere chaplain determined to hold service at the very hour of the ball. The church was filled, the ball-room deserted !

Other work besides preaching fell to Wesley. One of his daily duties was to teach a boys' school. There is a story of certain of the pupils who taunted the poorer boys because they came barefoot to school. The rumour of this came to Wesley. And what was the remarkable reproof given by this eccentric master ? He appeared one morning before his class without shoes or stockings ! It looks ludicrous, perhaps, to our modern eyes, but the rebuke was not ridiculed by those boys of Georgia. It killed their incipient snobbery, and set a bracing fashion in bare feet !

Probably none of that strenuous band of

colonists was more full of labours than was their chaplain. He preached in French to the French settlers, in Italian to the Vaudois from Piedmont, in German to the Saxon emigrants ; and on the top of these labours, this untiring worker learned Spanish that he might talk to his " Jewish parishioners," as he called them with a fine Anglican inclusiveness ! The Jews probably did not count themselves among his parishioners. But it gives us a glimpse into a breadth of sympathy unlooked for in the Oxford High Churchman, to read what follows in his *Journal* : " Some of these Jews seem nearer the mind that was in Christ than many of those who call Him Lord."

In spite of his initial success, Wesley's ministry in Georgia was marked for failure. Soon the tide of popularity turned, and he stood almost without a friend.

Dr. Burton of Oxford, who urged Wesley to accept the call to America, had sent his friend off with this caution ringing in his ear : " Remember your parishioners are babes. Feed them with the milk of the

Word, not with strong meats." Dr. Burton knew his man, and had only one fear for him—that his zeal for Church forms would hurt his influence among men who neither knew nor cared for such things. But John Wesley's—shall we call it conscientiousness, or his bigoted High-Churchism which saw the world through vestry-windows?—John Wesley's unreasoning insistence upon the mere "beggarly elements" utterly spoiled his work. It is hardly credible, yet we read of numerous amazing indiscretions.

For example, he insisted upon baptism by immersion, as the Apostolic and therefore the only proper method. He actually refused to baptize if the parents would not agree to his demand. He declaimed against the expensive dresses and jewels which some of the ladies wore to church. Probably for this rebuke there was ground; and indeed it checked the extravagance for a time. He refused to admit dissenters to Communion unless they denied the validity of their baptism and submitted to the rite at the hands of one Episcopally ordained. He

refused to read the burial service over a dissenter.

The crowning act of bigot folly, which broke all patience and raised a clamour of hostile criticism, was his refusal, against every art of persuasion, to admit a lady, the niece of the Chief Magistrate of Savannah, to Communion. This lady, some of Wesley's biographers explain, had cherished more than kindly feelings for the cultured young clergyman. Possibly, too, Wesley had conceived like feelings for her ; but he showed a prudence and a lukewarm caution in the matter, that is worthy of Calvin himself.

He consulted his Moravian friends on the wisdom of marrying Sophia Hopkey. This was a mistake, for even in such solemn affairs as the affections, it was a common custom at that time for the Moravians to commit this delicate business to the casting of lots. Not that they followed this method in Wesley's case ; but their advice to him was that Miss Hopkey would not make a suitable wife. Whereupon, not without pain (at least to Wesley), as we can read between the lines

of the *Journal*, they parted. Miss Hopkey soon married another, and Wesley years afterwards wrote down what he must long have carried deep in his heart : “ God commanded me to pluck out my right eye ; and by His grace I determined to do so ; but being slack in the execution, God being very merciful to me, my friend performed what I could not.” In these words, with a very touching reticence, Wesley records this crisis in his life.

This was the lady whom Wesley, on what he considered good ground, now refused to admit to Communion. The reason was paltry enough—some technical point of procedure, and with not a shadow of a moral objection—but Wesley’s stern sense of duty, probably all the stricter because he feared his own heart might fail him in the doing of it, made him insist upon carrying out the law of the Church.

Naturally, the indignant husband resented this high-handed action, and sued Wesley for libel. And presently, throughout that little gossiping community of New England

colonists, such scandal was flying that Wesley, finding his influence shattered, unexpectedly took the advice of his friends and sailed for home.

Charles Wesley had fared scarce any better. He had mixed himself up with women's quarrels in Frederica, and stepping between the combatants, got blows from both sides. As it was with his brother, the tide, once turned against him, ran in a high current of disfavour. He was fired upon. His very servants refused to serve. Friends passed him "with a stony British stare," and then wrote to explain that they dared not recognise him in public. "I begin to be abused and slighted into an opinion of my own considerableness," wrote Charles. "I could not be more trampled upon were I a fallen minister of state."

At last, a "friendly fever," caught in the Georgian swamps, brought the governor's permission to Charles Wesley to return to England. In July 1736, after only six months' stay, he sailed, with dispatches from the governor, for the port of Deal.

It was not until December of 1737 that John started, sick for home. "I shook off the dust of my feet, and left Georgia, after having preached the gospel there (not as I ought, but as I was able), one year and nearly nine months."



## CHAPTER X

### WITH THE MORAVIANS

THE missionary fiasco might have soured the spirit of many a man. Not so with Wesley. He was disappointed but not embittered. A weaker man would have cast about for an explanation of failure outside himself: John Wesley probed deep into his own heart, humbly praying to be shown there the cause of defeat.

It is easy for us, looking at the whole circle of the complete life, to put our finger on the flaw, and read the meaning of that one painful chapter. His preparations for colonial work had been the worst possible. This college ascetic, straight from the Oxford cloisters, and brimful of High Church bigotry, was the last man to send on pioneer work.

But men are led through strange ways, and  
Success often lies beyond the dark valleys of  
Defeat. For out of human error God shapes  
and organises Victory—

“ A paradox,  
Which comforts while it mocks,  
And Life succeeds in that it seems to fail.”

During the perilous passage home, Wesley's work among the crew was even more arduous than it had been on the voyage out. Yet ever, in the pauses of labour, rose the still unanswered question of the old Moravian: “ Do you know Jesus Christ? Do you know yourself? ” He was, at least, on the way to discover himself, for he now knew this: “ I went to America to convert the Indians, but oh! who will convert me? Who will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled.”

Death did look him in the face more than once during days of hurricane and tossing seas. But Wesley's spirit was untroubled.

Day after day he spoke seriously to his fellow-passengers, and at night lay down and slept serenely through the crashing storm.

At last the *Samuel*, battered and broken, put in at Deal, and by one of those strange coincidences which compel belief in an overruling Providence, before the ship cast anchor a vessel setting out for America was hailed. On board the outgoing ship was George Whitefield! After a year's preaching throughout England, marked by success such as has never been since Pentecost, Whitefield was on his way to America to repeat there the extraordinary triumphs that had crowned his work at home.

Wesley had just time to send him a message imploring him to stay and not risk a disastrous failure. His prayer was backed by a "sign" that he had got from God. Whitefield, however, less learned than Wesley, was also less superstitious, and, in spite of the warning "sign," he sailed.

As soon as Wesley's feet touched English soil again, he did not rest until he found him-

self once more in the company of the Moravians. One of them, Peter Böhler, was a man of ability and strength of character. With him Wesley had long and deep talk, and the result was to disconcert still more the returned missionary. In Georgia a German pastor had asked, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" Now, Böhler's question was, "Have you faith?" And John Wesley had to confess that the faith whereby alone (according to Böhler) men are saved, was unknown to him.

The convincing Moravian taught Wesley this primary fact of the Christian religion, that Faith, Faith only, saves from sin and Hell. Wesley's elaborate structure that had taken years to build, suddenly fell in ruins. "If that be so," he said, "I must at once stop preaching." But in this mood of pessimism Böhler gave a perplexing counsel. "Do not give up preaching," said the German, with a beautiful inconsistency. "But what am I to preach?" "Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith."

The poet Coleridge is inclined to treat this quaint counsel with ridicule. And indeed Coleridge's criticism of the paradox recalls the story of the man who came, after frequent repetition, to believe his own lies. Stranger than Böhler's paradox is the fact that Wesley set himself at once to act on his teacher's advice.

Not without misgivings and doubts, not without fits of "indifference, dullness, and coldness."

Nevertheless, with the despairing conviction that he himself was a castaway, he called on all men to be saved. Indeed, so fiercely did his zeal burn, that clergymen, alarmed for the decorum of the service, began to speak of keeping him out of their pulpits. But a man like Wesley could make a pulpit of a table in a public inn! He found a congregation in every stage-coach. He went to prisons with the message of forgiveness. He stopped passers-by on the streets, and told them of the love of God.

In saying this we do not mean that Wesley actually preached on the streets or in stage-

coaches. His regard for form and order kept him from such a step—at least until the time came when his scruples were overcome. But his work meantime was with the individual, the men and women he met on the streets going about their business. It affords one of the most curious psychological studies to see this man, in despair about his own soul, pleading with others to repent. There is nothing like it in all the annals of Revival.

There came at last an unforgettable day for Wesley and the world. On the 24th of May 1738 he rose at the usual hour, and at five “I opened my Testament on these words: ‘There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the Divine nature.’ Just as I went out, I opened it again on these words: ‘Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God.’ In the afternoon I was asked to go to St. Paul’s. The anthem was: ‘Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice. . . . For there is mercy with Thee, therefore Thou shalt be feared. O Israel! trust in the Lord.’

“ In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation ; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sin, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death. . . . I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, ‘ This cannot be faith ; for where is thy joy ? ’ Then was I taught that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation ; but that, as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth them, according to the counsels of His own will.”

In these words, John Wesley tells us the story of that crisis in his life—his “ new



birth.” In the light of this experience, he came to look back on his life of spiritual struggle and gloom as on a pit of clay from which at last his feet had been plucked and planted on the Eternal Rock. The 24th of May was ever afterwards referred to as his “birthday”—the day of his conversion.

There were, of course, those who knew Wesley’s past life of stainless purity, and to them his talk of conversion was simply unintelligible. He was in haste to testify to his change of heart, and, five days after, in a circle of chosen friends, he rose and declared that, until the 24th of May he had never been a Christian—neither could his friends call themselves Christians, unless and until they confessed their need of Christ, and prayed to Him for that faith which brings eternal life to all who believe. We are not surprised to hear this retort from one of the company, the lady of the house: “If you were not a Christian ever since I knew you, you were a great hypocrite, for you made us all believe you were one.” But the logical Wesley explained that not until one is linked



in a supernatural way by faith to Christ, is there any reality in the name "Christian."

It is a remarkable fact that, within a few weeks of each other, Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, by different paths but through a similar process, arrived at exactly the same position as that now held by John. Whitefield had indeed begun to preach the "new truth" to the astonished crowds who had "never heard it before in this wise." All three "converts" gave the same supernatural explanation of the change, and it seems to be altogether unreasonable for men, writing of these things long after they occurred, to go past the explanation of the men themselves and seek it in natural causes. The three men who were to begin the Second Reformation in England were led to a vivid experience of the power of religion through belief in an indwelling Christ. It was miraculous. It was unique.

Yet why should it be called unique? It was through reading Luther on "Romans" that light came to Wesley, but it was through reading "Romans" itself that light came

to Luther. "The just shall live by faith." This truth, flashed suddenly on the soul of Luther, led to the Reformation. The same truth, coming almost simultaneously to those three Oxford men, led to the great Revival of the eighteenth century.

We find the same experiences repeated many times in history. Thomas Chalmers in Scotland, a hundred years after Wesley, went through Wesley's conflict. For years that great Scottish preacher was reading beautiful but ineffectual sermons in the stately periods that were considered "good form" in those days of solemn *fudge*. But the day came when Chalmers left all that behind, and suddenly, like the warm breath of spring on frozen fields, into his cold and formal pulpit essays there was breathed the life which made him the leader of the "Evangelicals" in Scotland, and brought a Revival of Religion which sent a thrill through all the land.

During those dark days that came before his great discovery, Wesley remembered William Law. It is characteristic of him that

ten days before his own conversion he wrote to that mystic, telling him bluntly that for all his saintly life he was still in the bonds of sin. The time came when Wesley's judgment of his fellows grew more charitable, but at this stage he was led, in the heat of his zeal, to act and speak with a brusqueness of which he must afterwards have been ashamed.

Yet when we recall the Oxford days, and think how Wesley looked to Law as a sailor to the sun, we begin to wonder what might have been if the impressionable Wesley had never met Law. It is interesting to speculate upon the effect of such books as the *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Grace Abounding* had Wesley drunk from those pure wells. If he had, the story of his life would not have contained the chapter of those lost years in America. So, at least, it seems to our human judgment. Possibly we are quite wrong. The Providence which shapes our ends had in His plan for Wesley, as part of his training, that dark apprenticeship of failure.

A hundred years after John Wesley left

Oxford, there met, in Keble College, another "Holy Club," with souls as pure and aims as true as that first Holy Club—men whose ambition it was to spend their life in the pursuit of lofty ideals. We all know to-day the tragedy of the Tractarian Movement—its bright beginning and its sad declension; one by one those men seceded to Rome. It looked at first as if Wesley's feet were turning in the precise direction which Newman afterwards followed—Newman, who had prayed :

"Lead, kindly Light ! amid the encircling gloom,  
Lead Thou me on !"

But Wesley "followed the gleam," while Newman, mistaking the will-o'-the-wisp of his own imaginings for Light from Heaven, drifted farther and farther from truth and freedom, until at last he found refuge and rest in Rome.

## CHAPTER XI

### OPEN-AIR PREACHING

A WAY in the heart of Europe, in Saxony, near the borders of Bohemia, was a settlement of Moravians. They called their village "Herrnhüt," the Watch of the Lord, and there, under Count Zinzendorf, that devoted patron of Foreign Missions and author of the plaintive hymn, "Jesus, still lead on!" this primitive Church had its headquarters.

Their quaint customs, such as perpetual prayer and praise day and night; their solemn, almost mournful, rites of marriage; their eccentric training of the children in a colourless routine of all work and no play—marked these peculiar people off from their neighbours as clearly as the Jews were separated from the Canaanites, or the early

Christians from the heathen in Antioch. They were a "family of the Lord's own people," with Count Zinzendorf as their uncrowned king.

Thither, on the 1st of August 1738, John Wesley made his way, travelling on foot through Germany. There he spent two weeks, taking part in the Moravian services and exercises—so different in every detail from those of the Church of England. And there, in Herrnhüt, Wesley learned the secret of a consecrated life. It was Böhler, the Moravian, who, at home, in England, had led him into the truth. It was Count Zinzendorf, and the artisan preacher Christian David, who showed him the beauty and peace of the surrendered life. "God has given me," wrote Wesley from Marienborn (another Moravian settlement), "the desire of my heart. I am with a Church whose conversation is in Heaven, in whom is the mind which was in Christ, and who so walk as He walked. As they have all one Lord and one faith, so they are all partakers of one spirit, the spirit of meekness and love."

Leaving Herrnhüt, Wesley hurried home, in haste to introduce, as far as possible, the principles and methods of the Moravian Church. Presently, in London, we find him again seeking counsel of the brethren of that Church, attending their classes and meetings. Here, too, at the psychological moment, John met his brother Charles and his friend George Whitefield. What a story each had to tell! And how mighty in future possibilities was that meeting! It is not too much to say that when those three chiefs of the old Oxford band of "Methodists" came together, they made the plans which led to the beginning of the great Revival.

George Whitefield had returned from America after a success as pronounced as had been Wesley's failure. Coming straight to London, he had repeated his first triumphs there. He had then gone to Bristol, where thousands had waited on his ministry.

Whitefield's name stands out as that of the greatest preacher England has ever had. He had a voice so resonant that he could be clearly heard by thirty thousand people in

the open air on a hillside. He had infinite grace of gesture and superb dramatic genius. It has been told of nearly every great preacher, but it was first said of Whitefield by Garrick the actor, that he could pronounce the word "Mesopotamia" in a way that would draw tears! This humorous exaggeration is the best proof of Whitefield's power of treating even the commonplace.

On one occasion, in the course of a sermon, he drew a picture of a blind man wandering over a heath and gradually drawing near a precipice. When the preacher came to the climax of his illustration, and the audience were waiting with indrawn breath, the stillness was suddenly broken by no less a listener than the cold and cynical Chesterfield calling out, "Good God! the man's gone!"

Benjamin Franklin, who was at that time grown somewhat lukewarm to religion, confesses that having gone to hear him preach a charity sermon, and having buttoned his pockets up with the resolve not to give a copper, he ended by emptying all his gold



into the collection-plate. Even such a critic as David Hume declared that it was worth going twenty miles to hear Whitefield.

If such men as these were affected, it is no matter of surprise that the ignorant and poor broke down under the magic spell of the "Orpheus of the pulpit." Wherever he went, the churches were crowded. It annoyed the clergymen, however, to see the pews of rich parishioners filled, long before the hour of service, by a patient mob of rough and ragged peasants. Gradually the rectors and vicars began to refuse their pulpits to the evangelist, partly on the ground that he disturbed the pew-holders, but also because he seemed a setter forth of strange doctrine—Justification by faith, and the miraculous new birth.

At last, every church door was shut against the itinerant preacher. But not before a strange new thought had taken possession of Whitefield. Preaching once in a crowded church, he looked over the heads of the seated congregation, out at the open door, to a dense mass of silent listeners among the

tombs of the churchyard. "Why not go out to them, since they cannot all come in to me?" was the thought which seized Whitefield, and the locking of the church doors against him was the opening of an effectual door to wider service.

It was a daring step to take, and the preacher did not take it without trembling and searching of heart; but when Whitefield had broken with tradition and begun open-air preaching, "I thought it might be doing the service of my Master," he said quaintly, "Who, when He first preached, had a mountain for His pulpit, and the heavens for His sounding-board."

This first "conventicle" of Whitefield's was at Kingswood, near Bristol—a thickly peopled district in a country of coal-pits. Here lived a godless, ferocious race—men living beyond the pale of religion or even the law. Travellers hurried through, as through a country of brigands or a haunt of footpads. They were a people apart, a byword for vice and crime, and for their souls no man cared. Church or school there was none.

Whitefield, entering the social wilderness in February 1739, was moved with compassion for the shepherdless sheep. At once he began to preach under the open sky. At the first service two hundred colliers stood round. To the next, two thousand came ; and soon there were as many as twenty thousand gathered to hear him. He tells how his soul was stirred and fire burned in his bones at sight of the vast crowd hungrily listening, the tears making white gutters down the black cheeks of the colliers as they listened to the appealing tones of his wonderful voice. Men's hearts are like harps, quick to respond to the hand that sweeps the chords. And Whitefield was a skilled player on that sensitive instrument. He smote the strings, and called to life again the long-forgotten music.

News flew to Wesley of the novel step Whitefield had taken. And it gives us another glimpse into his rooted conservatism when we read this entry in Wesley's *Journal* : " I was so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have

thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church."

But there was no church in Kingswood. It lay on the far margin of the parish, and no curate would undertake the cure. Surely Wesley's orthodox qualms could not apply to the Kingswood conventicles. Here is his confession, before that year was out: "Many last winter used tauntingly to say of Mr. Whitefield, 'If he will convert heathens, why does he not go to the colliers of Kingswood?' In spring he did so. And as there were thousands who resorted to no place of public worship, he went after them into their own wilderness, 'to seek and save that which was lost.' When he was called away, others went 'into the highways and hedges, to compel them to come in.' And, by the grace of God, their labour was not in vain. The scene is already changed. Kingswood does not now, as a year ago, resound with cursing and blasphemy. It is no more filled with drunkenness and uncleanness. It is no longer full of wars and fightings, of clamour and bitterness. Peace and love are there.

Great numbers of the people are mild, gentle, and easy to be entreated. They 'do not cry, neither strive'; and hardly is their 'voice heard in the street'—unless when they are at their usual evening diversion—singing praise to God their Saviour."

These words, however, were written after six months had passed. When Wesley first heard Whitefield preach in the open air, he was filled with doubts on the decency and order of it. The doubts were dispelled in a day. The evening after the conventicle he addressed a meeting, and took for his text the Sermon on the Mount—"one rather remarkable precedent for field-preaching," as it suddenly occurred to him. The very next day following, he had made the plunge himself, and accepted Whitefield's call to succeed him in his mission-work at Kingswood. For Wesley, the break with tradition was complete. On that day the tremendous movement known as the Eighteenth Century Revival began, and the foundations of Methodism were soon laid deep in the land.

Here is the modest story Wesley tells of that great beginning: "On the morrow I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground near the city to about three hundred people. The Scripture on which I spoke was this (is it possible any one should be ignorant that it is fulfilled in every true Christian minister of Christ?): 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted; to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' "

Wesley's words are true. The Scripture is fulfilled in every sincere minister of Christ. But never since the Master applied it to Himself has it proved so prophetic as for Wesley. Every day, for fifty years after that Spring morning, was to witness the fulfilment. When Wesley first went out to preach his rediscovered gospel to the poor, the poor made an

instant response. Nothing in Church history is more miraculous than the overwhelming success of his preaching. When the cultured collegian left the dim religious light of the church and went out under the open sky; when he put aside "all the pomp of method and of art," and began to speak in the plain speech of common men, the results amply justified the change.

The hearts of the hearers leapt to the heart of the speaker. "Their souls," to use his own words of Puritan flavour, "instantly took acquaintance with each other." He gripped and held the conscience of his audience. Even Whitefield himself, skilled as he was in the human heart, and possessing far more of the orator's dramatic power and pathos, fell short of him in his convincing charm. Men sobbed aloud, under "conviction of sin." They stood for hours in pelting rain and sleet, greedy for every word. And when the sermon was finished they still stood, like men under a spell, unable to turn away. There was not a trace of sensationalism in his preaching. With clear statement, close



arguments, and rapier-like thrusts of application, he brought men face to face with themselves and Eternity.

One of Wesley's first converts was John Nelson, a Yorkshire mason, whose *Memoirs* remind us in every page of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*. Here is his vivid picture of the kind of impression the preacher made at the earliest open-air services: "I was like a wandering bird cast out of its nest, until Mr. John Wesley came to preach his first sermon in Moorfields. Oh, that was a blessed morning to my soul! As soon as he got upon the stand, he stroked back his hair and turned his face towards where I stood, and, I thought, fixed his eyes upon me. His countenance fixed such an awful dread upon me, before I heard him speak, that it made my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock; and when he did speak, I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me. When he had done, I said, This man can tell me the secrets of my heart; but he hath not left me there, for he hath shewed the remedy, even the blood of Jesus. Then was my soul filled



with consolation, through hope that God for Christ's sake would save me."

That unaffected narrative, told by John Nelson in words of simple beauty, helps us to read the secret of the preacher's power.

## CHAPTER XII

### ALL THE WORLD HIS PARISH

**D**URING the memorable year which marks the birth of the Revival, John Wesley preached five hundred times—and only ten times under a church roof! The circle of his influence widened, the numbers of his audience rapidly increased. In Gloucester he preached to seven thousand, at Blackheath to twelve thousand. On Kennington Common and at Moorfields, his hearers numbered twenty thousand!

Meanwhile, George Whitefield and Charles Wesley were doing a like work. Whitefield, about to sail again for America, turned back to take part in the evangelisation of England. In London and the regions round about, mass meetings were held, and they were followed by an extraordinary number of conversions.

Men who had sneered at religion, cultured men and illiterate men, ladies in emblazoned carriages and people from the slums, gathered to hear the rediscovered facts of the New Birth and the life of faith in Christ.

It can well be believed that in those vast congregations elements of discord and hostility appeared. But, for a time at least, popular sympathy was with the Evangelists, and "fools who came to scoff remained to pray." John Wesley, meeting opposition with consummate tact and good-humour, disarmed the loudest critics. His *Journal* gives a piquant account of his encounter with Beau Nash, king of Bath, when that celebrated gambler and Society leader tried to drive him from his kingdom: "5th June 1739. There was great expectation at Bath of what a noted man was to do to me there ; and I was much entreated not to preach, because no one knew what might happen. By this report I also gained a much larger audience, among whom were many of the rich and great. I told them plainly, the Scripture had concluded them all under

sin, high and low, rich and poor. Many of them seemed to be a little surprised, and were sinking apace into seriousness, when their champion appeared, and coming close to me, asked by what authority I did those things. I replied, 'By authority of Jesus Christ, conveyed to me by the (now) Archbishop of Canterbury, when he laid hands on me and said, "Take thou authority to preach the gospel."' He said, 'This is contrary to Act of Parliament. This is a conventicle.' I answered, 'Sir, the conventicles mentioned in that Act (as the preamble shows) are seditious meetings ; but here is no shadow of sedition ; therefore it is not contrary to that Act.' He replied, 'I say it is ; and besides, your preaching frightens people out of their wits.' 'Sir, did you ever hear me preach ?' 'No.' 'How, then, can you judge of what you never heard ?' 'Sir, by common report.' 'Common report is not enough. Give me leave, sir, to ask, Is not your name Nash ?' 'My name is Nash.' 'Sir, I dare not judge of you by *common report*. I think it not enough to judge by.'

Here he paused awhile, and, having recovered himself, said, 'I desire to know what this people comes here for.' On which one replied, 'Sir, leave him to me; let an old woman answer him. You, Mr. Nash, take care of your body: we take care of our souls; and for the food of our souls we come here.' He replied not a word, but walked away."

We detect a smack of relish in Wesley's telling of the story. And it certainly makes pleasant reading. We enjoy the scene like a picture: Beau Nash, the gambler and adventurer, recoiling from that thrust of subtle irony, "I do not judge *you* by common report"; then the *coup de grâce*—the fine gentleman of fashion, the "oiled and curled Assyrian bull," slinking off, silenced by an old woman in a shawl.

No doubt, in that sceptical age, men like Wesley were considered eccentric. Those who believed in the reality of the unseen, in holiness, in a God who judges in righteousness, were called "enthusiasts"—a sinister term, like our "fanatics" to-day. "He who believes in ecstasies and visions," said Vol-

taire, " who takes dreams for realities, and his imaginations for prophecies, is an enthusiast "—that is to say, he is mad. It was this sceptical temper of the time which gradually worked upon fears and prejudices, and led by and by to an active campaign, first of hostile criticism, and then of abuse and physical violence.

Of course it cannot be denied that the enthusiasm of Wesley, and those who came under his spell, often led to extraordinary scenes. Not only did men cry and groan aloud in an agony of repentance ; they flung themselves on the ground in what looked like nothing so much as convulsive fits. The scene must have struck a sceptical onlooker as highly incongruous—the excited behaviour of the audience, and the imperturbable calm of the speaker. The wonder deepens, when we are told that Whitefield, a far more violent preacher than Wesley, did not create these " ecstasies " ; and under Wesley, there is no doubt that many of the " supernatural signs " were caused by the sheer contagion of excitement. The explanation of the disconcerting

phenomena is most likely a very simple one : in the crisis of conversion, the mind acted on the body, and for a period the sufferer lost control of his limbs.

Southey often betrays a superficial spirit when he speaks of spiritual experiences, but he seems to come near the true explanation of the strange "fits." "As men are intoxicated by strong drink, affecting the mind through the body, so are they by strong passions influencing the body through the mind."

John Wesley himself was puzzled by these singular happenings ; but when he saw men, long the victims of vicious habits, laid hold of thus, and led to a complete change of life, he ceased trying to explain, and simply said : "One thing I know, whereas they were blind, now they see." He had some cases tested by a doctor, in order to meet the charge of fraud. And on the 1st June 1739, we find this pregnant sentence in his *Journal* : "Many were offended again, and indeed, much more than before. For my voice could scarce be heard amidst the groanings

of some, and the cries of others calling aloud to Him that is mighty to save. I desired all that were sincere of heart to beseech that He would proclaim deliverance to the captives. Many of those who had been long in darkness saw the dawn of a great light, and ten persons then began to say in faith, 'My Lord, and my God.' "

The most painful critic of these conversions was Wesley's eldest brother, Samuel. Concerning the whole Revival movement, his humour was sceptical, and he wrote their mother lamenting John's "delusion." John had written, six months before, to Samuel: "The question turns on matters of fact. You deny that God does now work these effects; at least, that He works them in this manner. I affirm both, because I have heard these things with my own ears, and have seen them with my eyes. I have seen many persons changed in a moment from the spirit of fear, horror, despair, to the spirit of love, joy, and peace; and from sinful desire, till then reigning over them, to a pure desire of doing the will of God. That such a change



was then wrought, appears not from their falling into fits, or crying out, but from the whole tenor of their life, till then, many ways wicked ; from that time, holy, just, and good. I will show you him that was a lion till then, and is now a lamb ; him that was a drunkard, and is now sober ; the whoremonger that was, who now abhors the very garment spotted by the flesh. These are my living arguments for what I assert, namely, that God does now, as aforetime, give remission of sins."

These are the words in which Wesley expressed his own belief in the reality of a changed life. He was convinced that it was a Divine process, and that it changed the whole bias of life. The strange contortions and cries of penitents by and by ceased, and Wesley's work of winning men from sin to godliness went quietly and steadily on.

Almost from the start, Wesley met with opposition from the clergy. Even in his own native parish of Epworth, he found the church closed to him, and had to preach from his father's tombstone. Later on, even that pulpit was denied him ; and in many parishes

he preached on bleak moors or rain-swept hillsides, for one, two, sometimes even for three hours, to men standing with uncovered heads, unconscious of the storm, in their eyes the far-away look of those who saw

“A light that never was on sea or land,”  
—the vision of the Great White Throne.

But the clergy, not content with keeping the Evangelists out of their churches, began now to denounce them from their pulpits, and to publish the most venomous pamphlets against them. It came at last to such a pass, that the Archbishop of Canterbury cited Charles Wesley to appear before him, to answer to a charge of “irregular conduct.” The prelate dismissed him with the dire threat of excommunication if he did not at once mend his ways. John Wesley, at Bristol, was haled before the Bishop, who addressed him thus: “Sir, you have no business here. You are not commissioned to preach in this diocese. Therefore I advise you to go hence.”

Wesley's reply is historic: “My business on earth is to do what good I can. Wherever,

therefore, I think I can do most good, there must I stay so long as I think so. At present, I think I can do most good here. Therefore here I stay. As to my preaching here, a dispensation of the gospel is committed to me, and woe is me if I preach not the gospel. . . . Being ordained a Fellow of a college, I was not limited to any particular cure, but have an indeterminate commission to preach the Word of God in any part of the Church of England. I do not, therefore, conceive that in preaching here by this commission, I break any human law. When I am convinced I do, then it will be time to ask, ‘ Shall I obey God or man ? ’ ”

These words were spoken to a Bishop of the Church. They are bold, but not long after he spoke still bolder words : “ God commands me to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another’s parish ; that is, in effect, not to do so at all, seeing I have now no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. Whom, then, shall I hear ? God or man ? If it be just to obey man rather than God,

judge ye. I LOOK UPON ALL THE WORLD AS MY PARISH ; thus far, I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation."

The man who spoke these historic words had set before himself the extraordinary ambition of carrying the gospel to every corner of the British Isles. For the rest of his life this was his aim ; and for fifty years he bent his energy to this task.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FIFTY YEARS' TOIL

**I**T would be impossible, within the scope of one small book, to follow John Wesley through the daily itinerary of these fifty years. Here we content ourselves with a general sketch of the work he accomplished.

No other man has left behind him such a record of achievement. It is not putting it too strongly to say that John Wesley preached more sermons than any other preacher who has ever lived ; that during his life he covered greater distances than any traveller of his day. Nor is this all ; in those same years he wrote and edited the extraordinary number of two hundred books !

Every year he travelled between four and six thousand miles, mostly on horseback.

Day after day he preached, sometimes twice, and often, on Sundays, thrice or even four times.

His three chief centres were London, Bristol, and Newcastle. From these he pushed out year by year, into remote and inaccessible corners of the kingdom, crossing also to Ireland, and penetrating far into Scotland. There were days when he arrived at his inn at nightfall, after a ride of ninety miles, and jotted down in his *Journal*, "I was no more tired than when I set out in the morning." Once, in an urgency, he covered, in two days, two hundred and thirty-eight miles.

And what miracles of difficulty many of these roads were over which he toiled! Even the turnpikes and highways were trenched with ruts like the furrows of a field, and strewn with large stones. We read of his horse taking three hours to travel fourteen miles. Up the steep fells of Cumberland and the "enormous mountains" of Scotland, through Lincolnshire fens and across bleak moors where snow-wreaths lay like death-

traps, the unresting evangelist again and again made his way. Once, after a heavy snowstorm—"but surely, if we cannot ride, we can walk at least twenty miles a day," cried the eager apostle, and for twenty miles he waded deep in snow, dragging his reluctant horse behind him.

Food was often hard to find, for hospitality was more than once withheld from the unknown visitor, and a bare floor in a shed was his bed. But rest was sweet to the tired traveller, and a wooden mattress did not hinder sleep. "Brother Nelson," was his morning greeting once to his friend—"brother Nelson, let us be of good cheer, I have one whole side left, for the skin is off but on one side." And, the same day, dining off the blackberries on a hedge—"Brother Nelson, we ought to be thankful that there are plenty of blackberries; for this is the best country I ever saw for getting a stomach, but the worst that ever I saw for getting food."

Discomforts could not interrupt his steady persistent toil. His day began at four, and

by five he was preaching—nor does he ever seem to have failed of an audience in that still hour of the morning. And always, on the long rides, in the hot sun or in the teeth of an easterly gale, out came a book from the saddle-bag, and Wesley, the reins flung loose on the horse's neck, would be deep in the volume—often with infinite risk to life on roads cruel to horses. Many were the spills and narrow were the escapes on those long rides. The indefatigable horseman has spun a theory in his *Journal* on the greater safety of slack reins in riding, but his own frequent falls would seem to have kept it strictly a theory.

His portable library was of the most catholic kind, Homer's *Iliad* or Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, or perhaps a history or work of Science. And at night, with sixty or seventy rough miles behind, when any other man would surely be dozing by the fire, with a brain benumbed with the fatigue of travel and preaching, Wesley would sharpen his pen and fall to filling his pages with a summary of the book he had been reading, and



perhaps a paragraph of stinging criticism—for he had an independent judgment on literary as on other matters, and he could be merciless. After his criticism, there might be a vivid description of the scenery he had passed through—for as he rode and read he had ever an eye on the landscape: a gentleman's country seat, a stretch of smiling valley, or a winding river, its banks carpeted with wild-flowers.

Yet never for an hour does he forget the supreme passion—all else pays tribute to that. He rejoices when his horse casts a shoe, for while the blacksmith works he can talk to him about his soul. He looks in on his friend Dr. Johnson, but before the man of learning has time "to fold his legs for a talk" with the man he admires, he is up and away to his next service.

Crowded as the hours were, life had a great zest for the busy man. On his own telling, he never experienced a quarter of an hour's depression of spirits. Humour sometimes rippled on the surface of the deeps. Of this his *Journal* gives pleasant instances. In

Durham, he saw tapestries with conventional Scripture scenes, ugly and grotesque. He describes these with a drollery equal to Dickens : " In Jacob's vision you see, on the one side, a little paltry ladder, and an angel climbing it in the attitude of a chimney-sweeper ; and on the other, Jacob staring at him from under a large silver-laced hat."

Again, on a preaching tour, he overtakes " a serious man, with whom I fell into conversation. He presently gave me to know what his opinions were, therefore I said nothing to contradict them. But that did not content him. He was quite uneasy to know whether I held the doctrines of the decrees as he did ; but I told him over and over, we had better keep to practical things, lest we should be angry at one another. And so we did for two miles, till he caught me unawares, and dragged me into the dispute before I knew where I was. He then grew warmer and warmer ; told me I was rotten at heart, and supposed I was one of John Wesley's followers. I told him,

No. I am John Wesley himself. Upon which,

‘Like one in thorny brake,  
Who treads upon an unseen snake,’

he would gladly have run away outright, but being the better mounted of the two, I kept close to his side, and endeavoured to show him his heart till we came into the street of Northampton.”

His first visit to Newcastle reveals his superb optimism. It is a city, he tells us, beautiful to look at, but—“I was surprised : so much drunkenness, cursing, and swearing (even from the mouths of little children), do I never remember to have seen and heard before, in so small a compass of time. Surely this place is ripe for Him who ‘came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’”

“Surely this place is ripe for Him !” The very conditions which would have dashed the spirits of any ordinary man, roused Wesley like a challenge. Here was the place for him to work ! To win converts here will surely give joy to the angels !

Few pages of the *Journal* are so self-reveal-

ing as this, when he tells of the state of Newcastle, and ends with that flourish of his gospel trumpet : “ Surely this place is ripe for Him ! ”

Wesley’s method of going to work in Newcastle may be quoted as his method for a hundred other towns. The very next day after arriving, being Sunday, “ at seven I walked down to Sandgate, the poorest and most contemptible part of the town ; and, standing at the end of the street with John Taylor, began to sing the Hundredth Psalm. Three or four people came out to see what was the matter, who soon increased to four or five hundred. I suppose there might have been twelve or fifteen hundred before I had done preaching ; to whom I applied those solemn words : ‘ He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.’ ”

“ Observing the people when I had done, stand gaping and staring upon me with the most profound astonishment, I told them,

' If you desire to know who I am, my name is John Wesley. At five in the evening, with God's help, I design to preach here again ! ' And at five, from the top of a little hill surrounded by a vast crowd, he preached his new surprising gospel. They had never heard it in such sort before, and hardly could a way be made through the dense mass of people, when the preacher went to his lodging for the night. They pressed upon him, following him to his door with the cry : " Come and tell us all this again." But, the seed sown, the sower could not stay, and next day he was off to Birstall.

The journeys and labours of these fifty years make what Mr. Augustine Birrell well describes as the " most amazing record of human exertion ever penned or endured." Surely John Wesley was one of the servants of God " whom Matthew Arnold addresses in his poem—one of those who had chosen their path "to a clear-purposed goal"—

" Languor is not in your heart,  
Weakness is not in your word,  
Weariness not on your brow."

Languor and weariness were strangers to Wesley. Year after year he preached in many places, in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. He loved the crowded streets of cities, but no hamlet was too small for him. There were towns and villages, in corners of the land the most remote, to which he made it a duty to pay a yearly visit.

One might think that, since Wesley had the rare power of summoning sleep at any moment, as he tells us, there would surely be some quiet intervals during his toils and travels, in which to rest and gather new strength. Not so! "We set out at five, and at six came to the sands. But the tide was in, so that we could not pass. So I sat down in a little cottage for three or four hours, and translated Aldrich's Logic." What a picture of a wild and windy March morning by the sea! He has an hour or two of enforced leisure; so he enters a Welsh cottage, and sets to work by the fireside at his translating—to the accompaniment of the clatter of cups and plates as breakfast is going forward! Not one hour for idle musing or the

“stupid trance” of travellers waiting the tide.

“Leisure and I have taken leave of each other,” he said once; but on the other hand, to a friend who said, “You have no need to be in a hurry,” his answer was, “Hurry! I have no time to be in a hurry.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### IN PERILS OFT

THE record of Wesley's unflagging effort would make pleasant reading for us to-day, if it were not for the fact that to the discomforts was added the constant danger of martyrdom. In every parish there were men who resented the intrusion of Wesley. These were the clergy, some of whom lived too far off to visit their own parish save at rare intervals. Many of the peasants who flocked to the village green to hear the "stranger parson" were listening for the first time to a sermon.

Wesley's coming shook the parishioner's faith in those

"Heathen priests and mitred infidels," as Charles Wesley called them in his haste; and, naturally, the rectors desired to oust



the troublers. The means for this lay at their hand. The people were grossly ignorant. It was easy to fill their ears with false tales about the evangelists. They selected John Wesley as the special object of attack. They thundered at him from the pulpit, calling him a Jesuit in disguise, a Jacobite, a spy in the pay of the arch-enemy, Spain. Then, plied with "ale and other encouragements," "that blind beast of insensate fury, the mob," was let loose on Wesley and his converts.

It is hardly credible, but there still exist parish records which show that the parish priest, or some stolid Justice of the Peace, was at the bottom of many of the riots. "We find and present Charles Wesley to be a person of ill-fame, a vagabond and a common disturber of His Majesty's peace"—so runs the entry in an Irish city's Records.

"Disturbers of the peace!" wrote John Wesley. "The Greatest 'Disturber of the Peace' is the Methodist Preacher, for who disturbs the peace of the parish like one who tells all drunkards, whoremongers, and com-

mon swearers, ' You are on the high-road to Hell ' ? ” “ That vagabond Wesley,” a clergyman called him, in a sermon warning his people not to go and hear him. Infamous charges of immorality were levelled against him.

Inflamed by these lies, the common people in many towns and villages began to rise against the Revival Movement. When the preachers came, rough threats would first be flung at them as they passed. Presently the open-air service began ; the crowd gathered, and with loud clamour tried to drown the speaker's words. From shouts they passed quickly to mud, turf, or even stones. Sometimes a herd of frightened cattle would be driven among the listeners, and once a bull was pushed against the table from which Wesley was speaking ; but for the strong arm of a friend thrown round him as he fell, he might have been trampled or gored to death.

But in spite of interruptions like these the “ Apostle of England ” calmly went on speaking, with that unearthly light upon his face

which the Oxford students used to see after his hours of secret prayer. He had a serene indifference to the most instant and pressing danger ; for he held that he was “ immortal till his work was done.” He would walk, smiling and talking quietly, through the heart of a crowd that was snatching the clothes from his back and aiming blows with clubs ; and go home to write with gratitude in his *Journal* : “ I lost but one flap of my waistcoat and a little skin from one of my hands.”

Of the same riot he writes : “ From the beginning to the end I found the same presence of mind, as if I had been sitting in my own study. . . . Only, once it came into my mind that if they should throw me into the river, it would spoil the papers that were in my pocket. For myself I did not doubt that I should swim across, having but a thin coat and a light pair of boots.”

Here is his reflection on that day's happenings : “ By how gentle degrees does God prepare us for His will ! Two years ago a piece of brick grazed my shoulder. It was

a year after that the stone struck me between the eyes. Last month I received one blow, and this evening two ; but both were as nothing. For though one struck me on the breast with all his might, and the other on the mouth with such a force that the blood gushed out immediately, I felt no more pain from these blows than if they had touched me with a straw." There is only one epithet we can give to this way of speaking : it is Christlike.

There were times when, despite the ill-usage, Wesley's humour bubbled up, and he was able to treat it with a light raillery. In Ireland "a Justice of the Peace came, and with a whole volley of oaths and curses declared, ' You shall not preach here to-day.' I told him, ' Sir, I do not intend it, for I have preached already.' This made him ready to tear the ground. Finding he was not to be reasoned with, I went into the house. Soon after he revenged himself on my hat, which he beat and kicked most valiantly."

But it was the magnetic charm of Wesley's personality that often saved him. In that

very onslaught, which he describes in his vivid way, "one whose hand was raised to strike, on a sudden let it drop, and only stroked my head, saying, 'What soft hair he has!'" One sees the heavy hand raised, and the sudden arrest—as a boy, with stone poised in air, might stop, struck by the beauty of the bird he meant to kill, and filled with a novel feeling of ruth. Presently a butcher, one of the mob, rounded on Wesley's tormentors, and scattered them right and left, making a lane for their victim to pass. There is a sturdy chivalry in the breast of the British workman. Probably the sight of the suffering, uncomplaining minister raised this slumbering chivalry, and so saved Wesley from more brutality, possibly from death.

Many of Wesley's escapes, however, were due to his own coolness and courage. Sometimes, when the way was clear, he stopped and turned about in his retreat, and walked back "to Ephesus and its wild beasts," refusing to flee until he had delivered his message, and felt free from blood-guiltiness. "The lions at Rochdale," he writes in the

tenth year of the mission, "were lambs compared to those at Bolton. Such rage and bitterness I scarce ever saw before in any creatures that bore the form of men. They followed us in full cry to the house where we went ; and as soon as we were in, took possession of all the avenues to it. . . . Believing the time was now come, I walked down into the thickest of them. I called for a chair. The winds were hushed and all was calm and still. My heart was filled with love, my eyes with tears, my mouth with arguments. They were amazed, they were ashamed, they were melted down, they devoured every word. What a turn was this ! " . . . Next day, " abundantly more than the house could contain were present, at five in the morning, to whom I was constrained to speak a good deal longer than I am accustomed to do. . . . Oh, how a few hours changed the scene ! We could now walk through every street of the town, and none molested or opened his mouth, unless to thank or bless us."

That night and morning at Bolton might almost be read as an epitome of Wesley's

life. Weeping endured through a long night, but the morning broke at last, bringing joy. After the gloom came the gleam. With the patience and persistence of great love, he fought on through years of obloquy, till at last he broke down opposition and conquered the hearts of all.

This change of popular sentiment filled Wesley's heart with a wondering gratitude. So accustomed had he become to cruelty, that when kindness came at last, he kept on congratulating himself: "19th January 1783. I preached in St. Thomas' Church in the afternoon, and at St. Swithin's in the evening. The tide is now turned, so that I have more invitations to preach in churches than I can accept of." And again he exclaims: "I am become an honourable man! The offence of the cross has ceased." When he was eighty-five he wrote at Falmouth: "The last time I was here, I was taken prisoner by an immense mob, gaping and roaring like lions. Yet how is the tide turned! High and low now lined the streets from one end of the town to the other, out of

stark love and kindness, gaping and staring as if the king were going by."

But Methodism, like other religious movements, had its martyrs. Not every follower of Wesley had Wesley's skill to still the tempests. The proto-martyr of Methodism, William Seward, was killed by a savage blow at Monmouth in 1741. Many suffered persecution, with the spoiling of their goods. Many were grossly ill-treated, tender women among the victims. Some were stoned to death, or died afterwards of their injuries.



## CHAPTER XV

### METHODISING

**J**OHAN WESLEY soon saw the need for many helpers, if permanent success was to be his. At first some of the clergy gave a little timid help, until they scented unpopularity, when most of them folded their hands and discreetly retired. Not all, however. Some stood staunch: they recognised a good work, and, to the end, continued leal friends to Wesley.

There was Thomson, who boldly faced the false and cynical Bishop Lavington. That prelate threatened to unfrock him if he did not discard Wesley and all his works. For answer, Thomson took off his robe and laid it at his Bishop's feet with the words, "I can preach without a gown." Among these honourable helpers were Vincent Perronet, Grim-

shaw, Fletcher of Madeley, and John Newton of Olney.

It was laymen, however, who became Wesley's chief supporters—uncolleged men with little Latin and less Greek, but with the love of God in their hearts. At first Wesley did not dream of asking them to preach. They might read the lessons at a meeting, or even give short lectures on the portion read.

But this state of things was bound to have a term ; and when Thomas Maxfield, in the heat of his zeal, preached a powerful sermon in London, Wesley was face to face with a perplexing crisis. "Take care what you do with respect to that young man," said his mother, "for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are." Wesley went to hear him, and rose from the service with his doubts cleared—"It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." Maxfield was forthwith appointed a lay preacher.

No act of Wesley's has called down on his head a louder clamour of criticism than this breach of Church law. But Maxfield and John Nelson (from whose *Memoirs* we

have quoted), Thomas Olivers and Alexander Mather, with many others like them, were the men who helped to spread the Revival over the land. In appointing his army of lay-preachers, John Wesley crossed the Rubicon—and he never saw cause to regret the step.

It ought to be borne in mind that John and Charles Wesley, notwithstanding the opposition they had met with at the hands of the clergy, continued to the end of their lives loyal sons of the Church. They had no thoughts of setting up a rival sect; what they aimed at was to bring back to the Church its lost power. They held their meetings at different hours from those of the Church service. They worshipped in the church of the parish in which they were at the time labouring. They took their followers to communion, until they were refused by the incumbent. For many years the sacraments were administered to the Societies by none save ordained clergymen. It was not until 1784 that John Wesley, driven to it by the needs of the situation, exercised his powers

as a "presbyter," and began to ordain men to the regular ministry.

How much Wesley owed to his mother's sagacious counsel, we have seen in more than one crisis of his life. The hour came when her help was withdrawn. Old, and bending under sorrowful burdens (her own and those of her ill-mated daughters), she laid herself down to die. In August 1742 her son came home from a preaching tour, and found her sinking. "She had no doubt or fear, nor any desire but, as soon as God should call, to depart and to be with Christ." That strong womanly character gave one last proof of her strength before she left her weeping family. "Children, as soon as I am released, sing a psalm of praise to God." And as her soul went home, they stood by the bed of death, and sobbed out their broken psalm of praise.

Before Susannah Wesley died, she saw Methodism strike its roots deep. Three years before, John Wesley had opened an old gun foundry in Moorfields, London, as a meeting-house for Methodists, and in the

place where weapons of war had been made, the gospel of peace was preached. This foundry became famous as the centre of Wesley's work in London. Similar centres were established in Bristol and at Kingswood. These buildings, with the numerous chapels which by and by sprang up all over the land, laid on Wesley's shoulders a heavy burden. It was not until 1784 that the burden, by a Deed of Declaration, was transferred to one hundred legal trustees. These trustees were appointed at the "Conference" or council of the preachers, who from the time that Wesley called them in 1744 to their first council, had continued, year after year, to meet in "Conference"—the Parliament of the Methodists.

To prevent any possible future difficulty about ownership, the "Conference of the People called Methodists" thus in legal form took possession of all the property which had been held in the name of John and Charles Wesley. At the same time they took over the responsibility and duty of appointing from time to time the preachers in these chapels. At this annual gathering discus-

sions took place on doctrine, but chiefly on questions of discipline and the work for the following year.

That most important part of the Methodist organisation, the Class meeting, was started in 1742 in almost an accidental way. Yet looking back at the first Class meeting, in the light of what it afterwards became, we see something romantic in that casual beginning in Bristol.

A debt lay on the buildings, and John Wesley proposed that the Bristol Society should tax themselves at the rate of a penny a week until the debt was cleared. Collectors were chosen to call on the members, but by and by, to save time and trouble, the members met together with their weekly payments. Afterwards it occurred to Wesley to improve the occasion of those meetings by prayer and spiritual counsel. Different "Classes" were accordingly formed, and experienced "Class Leaders" chosen. Thus, an arrangement made for financial convenience, became the centre and the strength of the Bristol Society. Through the Class

Leader the minister comes into closest touch with each member of the Class.

The example of Bristol was followed in other towns. Rules for the London Society were drawn up by John Wesley, with the help of his brother. The rules for one became the rules for all. They were adopted by the United Societies, and, until Charles's death in 1788, the names of both brothers were signed at the foot. They are the rules followed to-day by all in the membership of the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

## CHAPTER XVI

### WESLEY'S "JOURNAL"

THERE are three books of the eighteenth century which, far more than histories dealing with Kings and Parliaments, tell us the kind of life the people lived. These are Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, the *Letters* of Horace Walpole, and the *Journal* of John Wesley. Many books have been written about Wesley. But those four volumes from his own pen tell us more about himself, and the people he lived and worked among, than all these "Lives" together.

Like John Knox's *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, which is in great part Knox's autobiography, the *Journal* of John Wesley is a mine yielding abundance of material to all who, from the poet Southey down to our



own day, have told the thrilling story of Wesley's life and times.

Horace Walpole's clever but frivolous *Letters* are filled with what Thackeray calls "faint, fashionable fiddle-faddle." Boswell's *Life* gives delightful pictures of the literary circles of that brilliant time. But when we would learn how the poor—the workman in the towns, the peasant in the country—lived and spoke and thought, we turn to Wesley's vivid and fascinating pages. We see, in a mirror, the men and women of Wesley's day, as they moved about at their daily concerns, or gathered in the evening round the preacher in the street.

Augustine Birrell, in his striking essay on Wesley, says that as a writer he has not achieved distinction—he was simply a preacher, nothing more. Leslie Stephen says he has produced no book satisfactory in a literary sense. Others, whose judgment in such things is weighty, speak in a similar strain of disparagement. Wesley is not classed among the great writers of an age prolific in writers. But the *Journal*, in

spite of the critics, has that quality of distinction which, if he had cared for such fame, would have placed him high among men of letters. His style is direct, simple, lucid. His words, like feathered arrows, go straight to their mark. We readily admit that much of Wesley's written work, however useful it may have been when penned, is not now very readable. Many of the printed sermons make heavy enough reading. His spoken sermons thrilled and stung, but we miss this fire in the tomes of his recorded discourses. Nevertheless, the *Journal* which contains the story of his travels and toils, is a book which can still be read with delight.

Even such a fastidious critic as Edward Fitzgerald writes thus about it to a friend : " If you don't know it, do know it. . . . It is remarkable to read pure, unaffected, undying English, while Addison and Johnson are tainted with a style which all the world imitated." And Augustine Birrell himself, when he speaks of the *Journal*, drops his slight air of patronage and grows enthusiastic : " If you want to get into the eighteenth

century, to feel its pulses throb beneath your finger, be content sometimes to leave the *Letters* of Horace Walpole unturned, . . . deny yourself your annual reading of Boswell or your biennial retreat with Sterne, and ride up and down the country with the greatest force of the eighteenth century in England. No man lived nearer the centre."

We will give one or two extracts from the *Journal*; adapting the saying of Wesley as the introduction, "an ounce of illustration is worth a pound of description." Here is what the man who began life as an extreme High Churchman, but was afterwards "to be beaten with his own stick," says on religious tolerance: "I have no more right to object to a man because he holds an opinion different from mine, than I have a right to separate from a man because he wears a wig while I wear none. But if he happen to take off his wig and shake the powder in my eyes, I shall consider it my duty to—run away from him as soon as possible!"

Here and there we come upon gentle thrusts of sarcasm at the rich and cultured—

the people of his own class, be it remembered. "At eight I preached in the town-hall to the poor only, the rich could not rise so soon." Once, when the gentry of a certain town came in a body to hear him, "they behaved with as much decency as if they had been colliers." And again, "I was much surprised at the civility of the people, gentlemen as well as others."

Here is a portrait of the reigning sovereign, George II., as seen by Wesley at Westminster: "His brow was much furrowed with age, and quite clouded with care. And is this all the world can give even to a king? . . . A blanket of ermine round his shoulders, so heavy and cumbersome he can scarce move under it! A huge heap of borrowed hair, with a few plates of gold and glittering stones, upon his head. Alas! what a bauble is human greatness! And even this will not endure."

To those who think of Wesley as a man who delighted in toil, most at rest when most in movement, here is a confession which will be a discovery: "What marvel the devil

does not love field-preaching? Neither do I. I love a commodious room, a soft cushion. But where is my zeal if I do not trample all this underfoot, in order to save one more soul? "

Wesley could say hard things when he felt called to it. His own converts sometimes writhed under the lash of his rebuke. " I told the Society in plain terms that they were the most ignorant, self-conceited, self-willed, fickle, untractable, disorderly, disjointed society that I knew in the three kingdoms. And God applied it to their hearts, so that many were profited, but I do not find that one was offended."

Naturally he had a keen dislike of cant, declaring that he would rather hear a sermon on good temper than what is vulgarly called a " gospel sermon." " The term is now become a mere cant word. I wish none of our Society would use it. It has no determinative meaning. Let but a pert, self-sufficient animal, that has neither sense nor grace, bawl out something about Christ and His blood, or justification by faith, and

his hearers cry out, 'What a fine gospel sermon!' "

In Ireland and Wales, as in England, Wesley's work, after the first sharp persecutions, met with lasting success. But in Scotland he was chilled by the national humour of reserve. Indeed, he could not understand that almost foreign country. He had a quarrel with its language, its national kirk—even its mountains. The rugged peaks had no charm for Wesley—but then ! Wesley was on a horse, and had to climb through the steep "glacks." Horrible, horrid, rough—these are his epithets for the impeding mountains. There was no poetry in "the broad bare backs of those enormous mountains that lay in my way." They were to Wesley what the sea round Patmos was to St. John, who in his island-prison draws his pathetic picture of Heaven as a place where "there was no more sea."

Wesley boggled at the Scottish spelling and pronunciation. "At Selkirk I observed a little piece of stateliness which was quite new to me : the maid came in and said, 'Sir, the

lord of the stable waits to know if he should feed the horses.' We call him *ostler* in England." What Wesley calls a piece of stateliness was merely the maid's Scottish broadness of speech—"the laad of the stable!"

But it was with the religious coldness of the Scottish people that Wesley had his chief ground of quarrel. Like the Cornish audience of whom he once complained, they always showed "huge approbation and absolute unconcern." "There is seldom fear of wanting a congregation in Scotland. But the misfortune is, they know everything; so they learn nothing."

Here is the startling way he announces a friend's death: "In the afternoon I rode to Dover; but the gentleman I was to lodge with was gone a long journey. He went to bed well, but was dead in the morning; such a vapour is life." Here is another reference to the brevity of life. We find it in a preface to his *Sermons*: "I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: just hovering over the



great gulf ; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen ; I drop into an unchangeable Eternity ! ”

To one in doubt about his fitness for the ministry, Wesley sent this answer to his arguments : “ My dear brother, you do indeed appear to me to be out of your place, for the time you have spent in reasoning about it you ought to have spent in prayer.”

When the long tide of persecution was spent, and Methodism, in the words of the sneering Horace Walpole, became fashionable, John Wesley, arriving at a town where he had once suffered persecution, was received with every mark of respect and reverence. Here is his quaint comment : “ How soon should I melt away in this sunshine ! It was time to fly for my life ! ” And again, about the debilitating effects of popularity, “ Some perish by the storm, but far more by the calm.”

Of an attorney who incited the mob to riot, Wesley wrote : “ Poor man ! if men live what I preach, the hope of his gains is lost.” On seeing a ruined Scottish abbey he wrote :



"God deliver us from reforming mobs!" words which remind us of Sir Walter Scott's Andrew Fairservice, and his wish that the reforming mob had left the abbeys standing—"the reform wad hae been just as perfect, and we wad hae mair Christian-like kirks." It is curious and pleasant to think that Sir Walter Scott was taken, as a boy, to hear Wesley preach.

When refused permission to visit Bedlam, Wesley wrote: "They won't let me go to Bedlam, because they say I make the inmates mad; or into Newgate, because I make them wicked."

Quaint words and phrases are met with again and again throughout the pages of the *Journal*. About some converts at a service he says: "Six or seven prisoners of hope were set at liberty this day." He talks of "eminent sinners," "eminent drunkards"; of "serious congregations" and "serious men." Of one who interrupted a service with angry clamour, the hardest word he has is to call him a "warm man."

The essential charm of Wesley's journalese

is its easy unconscious flow. "I spare both the reader's time and my own, by couching the sense in as few words as I can." And every sentence shows how he followed his own rule. What he had to say he said, and was off to his business of preaching. He seemed to write with his pen in one hand and the riding-whip in the other. There is a buoyancy and spring, as of the open air and quick movement.

Yet not without pains and drudgery did the Oxford scholar come to his lucid and simple style. We have a story of his first lessons in the art of plain writing. He read his early sermons to a servant, bidding her, when he came to a word she did not understand, cry "Stop, sir!" And "Stop, sir!" came so often, that he was like to lose patience. But he cast out every offending word, and put, instead, the word Betty understood. Thus he learned to preach "plain truth to plain people."

Wesley's talk was even better than his writing. In his college days the gownsmen used to gather round to hear Jack Wesley

debate ; and we have the testimony of that prince of talkers, Dr. Johnson : " Mr. Wesley's conversation is good. He talks well on any subject. I could converse with him all night." Until the end, this magnetic gift was his. And now and then, like sparks from clashing steel, there would leap forth a phrase, crisp and bright, to startle and delight the listener.

On one occasion the busy worker was called away from his work to speak to some visitors. He went, and found they had nothing to say after sending for him. " I believe, ladies, the maid mistook : you only wanted to look at me."

On one occasion he arrived unexpectedly at the house of a fussy friend, who had nothing to set before his guest for dinner. Wesley at once put him at his ease by offering to take him to a friend's, where they could both get dinner. He led him straight to the house of a poor widow whom he supported. " Sister, I have come to dine with you, and I have brought a friend with me." " Sir, you are welcome : I have got some good bread, and some good cheese, and I'll fetch you some

porter." Wesley turned to his companion with a smile: "I told you I could bring you to a place where we could both make a dinner."

There is a story of Wesley's preaching to what he would call a "genteel crowd" of ladies and gentlemen, who had most likely come together out of curiosity. His text was, "O generation of vipers! who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" A friend expostulated with him, telling him he might have taken a kinder text, and kept this for the drunken colliers. "No!" was the quiet response; "if I were preaching to a crowd of publicans and sinners, I would preach on the text, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'"

## CHAPTER XVII

### WESLEY AND PREDESTINATION

**I**T has been calculated that in the course of his evangelising work, John Wesley travelled a quarter of a million miles, mostly on horseback, and preached forty thousand sermons.

In addition to the toil that these figures tell of, he took the careful oversight of a school at Kingswood for the children of the increasing army of preachers. For this school Wesley prepared all the text-books. By and by, another call was made upon him, to undertake the teaching and training of the preachers. In order to make this as rapid and thorough as the needs required, Wesley wrote grammars in English, French, Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, besides preparing text-books of Logic, History, and Philosophy, and numerous other

books and pamphlets. Altogether, as has been stated, Wesley wrote or edited the prodigious number of two hundred books ! Is it matter for wonder that in the midst of these strenuous activities, a serious illness brought him near the gates of death ?

Wesley himself looked upon the year 1753 as his last on earth. But the crisis passed, and he slowly recovered. The leisure of convalescence was employed in preparing several works for the press, revising different books for his famous "Christian Family Library"—cheap abridgments which met with extraordinary popularity, being the first attempts at good literature for the people—and commencing his "Notes on the New Testament."

When Wesley lay awaiting death at this time (nearly forty years before it came), he composed an epitaph for himself, which he desired should be the only one on his tombstone, "in order to prevent vile panegyric" :

"Here lyeth the body of John Wesley, a brand plucked out of the burning ; who died of a consumption in the fifty-first year of

his age, not leaving, after his debts are paid, ten pounds behind him ; praying, ‘ God be merciful to me an unprofitable servant.’ ”

In the providence of God, he was destined still to see many years of toil for the cause he loved so well.

Wesley was called upon during his strenuous life to endure not only toil and persecution, but to suffer more than one poignant sorrow.

The first was caused by the great schism with his friend Whitefield, on the question of Predestination. This occurred quite early in their life-work. When the two friends and partners discovered that this disputed point was like to make a gulf between them, they were wise enough to agree to go on with their great work and ignore their difference. But their followers were not so wise, and dragged the leaders again into the dispute. It was impossible that men like Wesley and Whitefield should consent to turn their weapons against each other, and until Whitefield’s death in 1770, at the age of sixty-seven, only the kindest feelings were cherished by each

toward the other. On Whitefield's death, Wesley preached his funeral sermon.

It was after 1770 that the worst fury of the storm broke and raged for years. Wesley, with his acute intellect and trained logical mind, could not keep silent on a question which affected him so keenly. Among those who withstood Wesley was Augustus Toplady, author of "Rock of Ages." It is difficult to believe that the man who wrote that exquisite hymn could also write to the man he had loved and revered, calling him "a Jesuit, a lurking, sly assassin," "the most rancorous hater of the gospel that ever appeared in England."

But Augustus Toplady filled some pages of a letter with such fierce abuse, that for the first time in his life Wesley was goaded to a retort that was unworthy of him. "Mr. Augustus Toplady I know well: but I do not fight with chimney-sweepers. He is too dirty a writer for me to meddle with; I would only foul my fingers. I read his title-page, and troubled myself no further."

It is but fair to Toplady to say that his



letter to Wesley, so hot and heaped up with abuse, had been provoked by one of the most clever and trenchant attacks on Toplady's cherished doctrine of Election that has ever come from the brain of man.

Here is the conclusion of that piece of sarcastic logic which Wesley puts into the Calvinist's lips : " The sum of all is this : one in twenty (suppose) of mankind are elected ; nineteen in twenty are reprobated. The elect shall be saved, do what they will ; the reprobate shall be damned, do what they can. Reader ! believe this or be damned." It is worthy of remark that, lurid and terrible as these words are, they were to be surpassed in weird and awful power by the poem of a young Ayrshire ploughman, published fifteen years after this. The first verse of that scorching satire runs :

" O Thou, wha in the Heavens dost dwell !  
 Wha, as it pleases best Thysel',  
 Sends ane tae Heaven and ten tae Hell,  
     A' for Thy glory ;—  
 And no' for ony guid or ill  
     They've dune afore Thee."

The question arises, Did Robert Burns see

this pamphlet of Wesley's? It seems to us extremely likely that the Scottish poet, who flung himself with fervour into the Calvinistic Controversy in Scotland, eagerly followed this seven years' conflict in England.

Well! the dust of that old controversy still flies in certain parts. But Calvin and Arminius, and Wesley and Whitefield and Toplady have met where all disputes are settled, and the noise of controversy is hushed. The great army of Methodists is still cleft into the two divisions of Wesleyan Methodists and Calvinistic Methodists.

The second cross which Wesley had to carry arose from his marriage, which from beginning to end spelt misery to him. His wandering life was ill suited to the married state. He must have loved Mrs. Vazeille, for it was to spend an hour by her sick-bed that he covered the ground twice over between Bristol and London—a distance of two hundred and thirty miles—in two days. Yet for twenty years she was to Wesley what Xantippe was to Socrates. She had a cruel monomania, jealousy, which tormented her-

self and harassed the husband who had the heart of a little child for innocence. Some biographers say that Wesley's quixotic efforts to reclaim fallen men and women gave his wife some grounds for her base suspicions. But the truth of it is, Mrs. Wesley lacked the spiritual range to appreciate that Christlike friend of Magdalenes. At last she left him, and he relinquished her without an effort to keep her. They met more than once as friends, but probably they drifted farther and farther apart, until Mrs. Wesley's death in 1771.

It gives a proof of Wesley's nobility and strength of character, that he bore even her savage physical attacks uncomplaining and unresisting. And never for a day did he slacken his grip of his labours. Rising superior to his private griefs, he carried in the face of the world "a heart at leisure from itself."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE SUNSET AND THE CROWN

WESLEY began now “after many days,” to reap large harvests of his liberal sowing. “He had battled through the equinox of life, through good report and evil he had kept his course; and now he drew near the crown and harbour.”

Yet, as old age came on, there was no stay in his toil, or stint in his sowing. Right on until the end, with never a thought of sparing himself, he worked. Here, in his *Journal*, is an example of the extraordinary buoyancy that bore him up long after his friends had fallen: “How is this, that I find” (on his seventy-first birthday) “just the same strength as I did thirty years ago? That my sight is considerably better now, and my

nerves firmer, than they were then? That I have none of the infirmities of old age, and have lost several I had in my youth? The grand cause is, the good pleasure of God. The chief means are: 1, My constantly rising at four, for about fifty years. 2, My generally preaching at five in the morning—one of the most healthy exercises in the world. 3, My never travelling less, by sea or land, than four thousand five hundred miles in a year.”

At eighty he said, “God grant I may not live to be useless! Rather may I

My body with my charge lay down,  
And cease at once to work and live.”

At eighty-one he declared, “I am as strong as I was at twenty-one.” On his eighty-fourth birthday he goes so far as to admit that he cannot run or walk as fast as he once could. “But I do not feel any such thing as weariness, either in travelling or preaching.” That this was not the usual senile boast of the old, we see from the fact that within the next two days he preached six times! And in that year he walked the London

streets for a week asking money for the poor !

But at last strength began to fail. " I am now an old man, decayed from head to foot," he writes on his last New Year but one. " However," and we see him pulling himself straight, " blessed be God, I do not slack my labour ; I can preach and write still." Then, on the last birthday, at eighty-six, comes this happy note : " I feel no pain, only it seems nature is exhausted ; and, humanly speaking, will sink more and more, till

' The weary springs of life stand still at last.' "

Even so it happened. As he said of his friend Dr. Johnson, " by a gentle decay he sank into the grave." Surrounded by the love of his countrymen, and revered to the degree of worship by his followers, Wesley drew near the end. Those who saw him in those declining years, speak of the extraordinary beauty of his face, with its fresh complexion, the clear smooth forehead, eyes bright and piercing—yet soft as with the light of another world—and, flowing to his shoulders, the long white hair. Children

ran to him, and clung to him. As he walked on the street, strangers caught and kissed his hand. "Little children, love one another," was his benediction as he passed. Towards the very end, when he preached, he was helped into the pulpit, where, "in age and feebleness extreme," he told the simple story of the Cross.

George Eliot's picture of him, in *Adam Bede*, is drawn with literary grace. Dinah Morris describes him as "a very old man, with long white hair ; his voice was very soft and beautiful, not like any voice I had ever heard before. I was a little girl, and scarcely knew anything ; and this old man seemed to me such a different sort of a man from anybody I had ever seen before, that I thought he had perhaps come down from the sky to preach to us, and I said, 'Aunt, will he go back to the sky to-night, like the picture in the Bible ? ' "

Wesley's last service to the world was to write (it was all he could do now !) to Wilberforce, to cheer him on in his struggle for the emancipation of the slaves, a cause to which

that noble worker had been inspired by Wesley. "Go on," said the dying saint, "in the name of God and the power of His might, till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish." It was a grand trumpet-call from the emancipator of ten thousand slaves of sin.

The day after that letter was written, Wesley lay down to die.

The woman who was constantly with him in the last months of his life, tells the story of his passing. A few hours before he fell asleep, he called for a pen and ink. But his hand could not hold the pen. "I said, 'Let me write for you, sir; tell me what you would say.' 'Nothing,' returned he, 'but that God is with us!'" Shortly afterwards, "he broke out in a manner which, considering his extreme weakness, astonished us all :

'I'll praise my Maker while I've breath;  
And when my voice is lost in death,  
Praise shall employ my nobler powers:  
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,  
While life, and thought, and being last,  
Or immortality endures.'

". . . A little after, after having tried in



vain to speak, he seemed to summon all his little strength, and cried out, 'The best of all is, God is with us'; and again, 'The best of all is, God is with us!' The last word he was able to speak was 'Farewell!' and 'without a lingering groan,' this man of God gathered up his feet in the presence of his brethren." Thus does Betsy Ritchie, one of the early saints of Methodism, tell of the death of the first Methodist.

Ten thousand mourners came to look their last upon him. With a design to prevent crowding and accidents, he was laid in his grave between five and six in the morning. There was an appropriateness in the hour: it was the hour at which, for fifty years, he had preached almost every day.

It was a simple funeral, as he had desired—no hearse, no coach, no escutcheon, no pomp, nothing but the tears of those who loved him. When the officiating clergyman came to the words: "for as much as it hath pleased Almighty God of His great mercy to take unto Himself the soul of our dear brother"—he paused a moment, and with a break in his

voice, instead of brother, read *Father*. In an instant the vast congregation broke into a great cry of sorrow, and for a time deep sobs drowned all utterance.

“SUCH A LIFE HAD SUCH A CLOSE.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### FRUITS

**I**N 1791, the year of John Wesley's death, the Methodists in England numbered seventy-nine thousand ; in America, fifty thousand. Now, they are spread over all the world, and number close on eleven and a half millions. In 1791 there were in the various English circuits three hundred preachers ; to-day the world-total of ministers and lay-preachers exceeds 141,000, with over 182,600 churches and meeting-houses.

These dazzling statistics are surely a testimony to the remarkable influence of Wesley's extraordinary personality. To found a Church (for that was the final issue of Wesley's work, though it was far from his thought or his wish) which has grown to such a magnitude, was a work which only a great man could

accomplish. But Wesley did more than found a Church. He sweetened the whole moral atmosphere of the country. To what depths England might have continued to sink, had not Wesley appeared, it is hard indeed to think. By his rediscovery of the doctrine of salvation by faith, the national Church was stirred and quickened to a new life and higher ideals. The influence of the Revival leavened political life. Leaders in Parliament ceased to sneer at appeals to conscience and honour. Leslie Stephen points to the abolition of slavery as the most marked result of the Methodist Revival. And, by turning their thoughts to personal religion, Wesley's influence in that feverish time of the French Revolution kept the lower classes from breaking out into an insurrection that might have drenched Britain in blood.

John Wesley is the hero of England's Second Reformation. No single man since Luther has so moved the world. Indeed, when we compare Wesley with Luther or Knox, we can find at least one feature of the Reformation wherein he outsoars them.

Luther and Knox never had to stand alone—they were conscious of the secret sympathy of the crowd. Not so Wesley. He stood fronting the dull and stupid ill-will of angry mobs ; yet he never lost heart, for he was as conscious of a call to a great work as ever Cromwell was. And no other man has done so much for England.

“ The work of such men as Wesley survives them, and continues to operate when nothing remains of worldly ambition but the memory of its vanity and its guilt.” Justin M’Carthy says : “ Napoleon never went through such suffering for the love of war, or for the conqueror’s ambition, as Wesley was accustomed to undergo for the sake of preaching to ignorant and obscure men, whose conversion could bring him neither fame nor fortune.”

That was Wesley’s secret. He might have been, as Lecky and Macaulay declare, a great world’s statesman. But his eyes rested on the Eternal Hills, and to Mr. Worldly Wiseman he made answer : “ I seek a Country.” In an age of unbelief, Wesley believed. He believed intensely, therefore he spoke. What

England needed was a national evangelist, and God sent John Wesley. His monument stands in Westminster Abbey "in marble not whiter than his spotless life." And to-day, all over the world, men thank God for His gift of John Wesley.

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